



# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

**Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner**

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2024, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) continued its upward trajectory in professionalism, accreditation readiness, and public service delivery. The year was marked by growth in investigative specialization, integration of advanced systems, expanded partnerships, and data-driven innovation, all supporting the agency's core mission of medicolegal death investigation.

The DCOME saw enhanced performance across nearly every operational domain. Through the ongoing leadership of Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Albert Chu and Chief of Forensic Investigations Amber Weeks, the agency solidified its standard operating procedures, developed high-performing internal teams, and updated technology to improve case handling and data integration. Dr. Chu's leadership in pathology helped streamline morgue operations and peer review processes, while Ms. Weeks' strategic initiatives advanced investigator certification, internal committee development, and specialized death review protocols.

### **Key Accomplishments:**

- **Professional Development & Certification:** Four of the seven forensic investigators are now board-certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), a critical milestone required for office accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). Weekly case file peer reviews, wellness initiatives, and specialized committee assignments (such as community outreach and education) further contributed to staff development and morale.
- **Psychological Autopsy Initiative:** Launched in June 2024, this groundbreaking program is designed to reconstruct the mental state and life circumstances of individuals who died by suicide. The initiative uses in-depth case studies, family interviews, and interagency collaboration to better understand the causes and contributors to suicide deaths. This data will inform future prevention strategies and public health interventions, and early results have already sparked academic interest and partnerships with public health and university researchers.
- **Technology & Systems Integration:** The DCOME expanded use of its case management system by integrating with both the National Medical Services (NMS) toxicology lab and Pennsylvania's new electronic death reporting system (eVitals). This integration has eliminated duplicative entry processes and improved turnaround time for both death certifications and postmortem report completion.
- **Policy, Planning & Accreditation Readiness:** In 2024, the agency launched a new digital SOP and training library and began implementation of its Mass Fatality Plan, the first of its kind in county history. These efforts support risk management, legal compliance, and future NAME accreditation.

- **Investigative Excellence & Specialization:** The DCOME established specialized review teams for categories such as child deaths, violent deaths, motor vehicle fatalities, suicides, and cold cases. Notably, the violent death review and peer oversight structures have added quality control and depth to casework.
- **Workforce Stability:** Staffing remained strong and fully filled throughout 2024, an unprecedented shift from previous years marked by high turnover. The culture continues to evolve into a unified and mission-driven organization described by partner agencies as “the place to be and work.”

### **Fiscal Management & Grant Acquisition:**

In 2023, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) operated under an unsustainable pathology staffing model, spending \$1.39 million on per diem forensic pathologists. Administrator Jeffrey Lange recognized the inefficiency and long-term risk of this approach, which lacked both fiscal sustainability and leadership continuity. In response, he led a strategic restructuring of pathology operations. Under his leadership, the Office successfully recruited a full-time Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Albert Chu, at a salary of \$300,000. Dr. Chu subsequently attracted a second full-time pathologist, Dr. Michelle Nagurney, who joined in March 2024 with a salary of \$250,000. As a result, per diem expenditures dropped dramatically to \$144,207 in 2024, reducing total pathology-related personnel costs to \$694,207—nearly a 50% decrease. This transition established a more stable financial model while improving consistency, service quality, and departmental leadership.

The DCOME also secured over \$375,000 in grant funding this year, alleviating pressure on the County’s general fund:

- \$151,000 from opioid settlement funds for expanded toxicology testing.
- \$95,000 through a DOJ/BJA grant to support forensic initiatives including the Psychological Autopsy Program.
- \$130,000 in state funds exclusively designated for training and education, which fully absorbed all operational costs related to staff development, including travel, certifications, subscriptions, and continuing education, previously paid from the operating budget.

These strategic financial wins have allowed DCOME to reinvest in its staff and services without increasing taxpayer burden.

## Statistical Data Highlights:

- **Total Jurisdictional Death Investigations:** 644
- **Total Non-Jurisdictional Death Investigations:** 935
- **Examinations Performed:** 511 (autopsies and external examinations), with an additional 133 record review cases
- **Cremation Approvals:** 1806
- **Firearm-Related Deaths:** 46 (17 suicides and 29 homicides)
- **Child Death Reviews:** 8 cases reviewed, with 2 involving weapons
- **Total Homicides:** 34 (compared to 33 in 2023)
- **Drug Related Deaths:** 20.53% decrease in drug-related deaths compared to 2023
- **Suicides:** 45% decrease in suicides from compared to 2023

## Introduction

This report provides detailed insights into deaths investigated by the DCOME during the 2024 calendar year. This data serves as an essential resource for county leaders, public health professionals, and community stakeholders to identify trends, particularly in preventable deaths, that can guide public policy and interventions.

The DCOME operates as one of only three counties in Pennsylvania that utilize a medical examiner system, which is distinct from the coroner system used by the other counties in the Commonwealth. In a medical examiner system, only a licensed forensic pathologist may certify the cause and manner of death. In contrast, coroner systems utilize elected officials who are not required to have medical credentials, yet may legally issue death certificates.

It is important to note that not all deaths occurring in the County fall under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner. The majority of natural deaths are certified by attending physicians or primary care providers and do not require a medicolegal investigation. However, under Pennsylvania law, specific types of deaths must be reported to the DCOME (see below). These include deaths that are sudden, unexpected, violent, suspicious, unattended, or involve public health risk.

Upon receiving such a report, a board-certified medicolegal death investigator conducts a preliminary assessment to determine whether the circumstances meet the statutory threshold for jurisdiction. When jurisdiction is accepted, the DCOME assumes responsibility for the medicolegal investigation, including determining and certifying the official cause and manner of death.

In addition, any death in the County that results in cremation must be reviewed, investigated, and approved by the DCOME. This investigative process includes reviewing medical records, autopsy or external examination reports (if applicable), and verifying details submitted by funeral homes. This statutory safeguard ensures compliance, transparency, and the integrity of final dispositions.

# **Mission, Vision and Core Values**

## **Mission**

Our mission is to conduct expert medicolegal investigations into deaths that occur under statutorily prescribed circumstances. The findings of these investigations are then independently shared with members of the public and relevant agencies to improve public safety and health.

## **Vision**

By having licensed practitioners and professionally trained staff who conduct medicolegal investigations and adhere to industry standards in a setting striving for industry accreditation, we aspire to establish ourselves as a trustworthy source of accurate, scientifically supported assessments of deaths in our community.

## **Core Values**

**Service** – The highest value that we uphold is service. We pledge to provide efficient, uplifting, moral, and compassionate service to the general public and to one another.

**Integrity**- We commit to conducting ourselves respectfully and professionally at all times when interacting with the people we serve and with one another. We commit to doing our best to be sincere, moral, and diligent. We commit to taking responsibility for our words and deeds and developing an organization that upholds integrity by demanding the same of others. When no one is looking, we still act morally.

**Compassion** - We agree to practice empathy for one another and the people we serve and be aware of the potential negative effects of our words and deeds on others. We understand that speaking openly and kindly, even in the midst of disagreement, is an act of compassion.

**Positivity** - We understand that perspective is important to attitude and that accurate assessments do not need to be pessimistic. We promise to face obstacles with a constructive mindset.

**Adaptability** - We understand that nothing remains the same. We pledge to look for the good in change and recognize that it presents an opportunity for development.

**Teamwork** - We understand how crucial it is to collaborate with people outside of our department and other department members; everyone on the team has a part to play. We strive to foster a positive, cooperative, service- and solution-oriented culture.

**Boundaries** - We understand that there are boundaries within which we must talk and act, and for our team to succeed, each member must put their all into playing their part. We pledge to work within the parameters of our responsibilities while being careful not to take on inappropriate roles or to criticize or undermine those in other jobs.

## **Legal Authority**

The DCOME's mission is mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as follows:

### **Act 154, Section 1218-B**

(A) Duty. The Coroner (Medical Examiner), having a view of the body, shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning a death that appears to have happened within the county, notwithstanding where the cause of the death may have occurred, for the purpose of determining whether or not an autopsy or inquest should be conducted in the following cases:

- (1) A sudden death not caused by a readily recognizable disease or, if the cause of death cannot be properly certified by a physician on the basis of prior recent medical attendance.
- (2) A death occurring under suspicious circumstances, including if alcohol, a drug or another toxic substance may have had a direct bearing on the outcome.
- (3) A death occurring as a result of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal or accidental, including, but not limited to, a death due to mechanical, thermal, chemical, electrical or radiational injury, drowning, cave-in or subsidence.
- (4) A death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug overdose or reaction to a drug or medication or medical treatment was a primary or secondary, direct or indirect, contributory, aggravating or precipitating cause of death.
- (5) A perioperative death in which the death is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease.
- (6) A death in which the body is unidentified or unclaimed.
- (7) A death known or suspected to be due to contagious disease and constituting a public hazard.
- (8) A death occurring in prison or a penal institution or while in the custody of the police.
- (9) A death of an individual whose body is to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be unavailable for examination thereafter.
- (10) A sudden and unexplained infant death.
- (11) A stillbirth.

(B) Purpose. The purpose of an investigation under subsection (a) shall be to determine:

- (1) The cause and manner of the death.
- (2) Whether or not there is sufficient reason for the coroner to believe that the death may have resulted from a criminal act or criminal neglect of a person other than the deceased.

(C) Requirements. As part of an investigation under subsection (a), the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.

## **Organization of the Office of the Medical Examiner**

The DCOME is organized into departmental sections as follows:

**Administration and Administrative Support-** This section provides leadership and strategic direction for the entire agency. Administrative staff manage business functions including reception, scheduling, records management, data entry, analytic reporting, and validation of electronic death certificates. This section also includes the Chief of Forensic Psychology, who oversees bereavement counseling services and spearheads the Psychological Autopsy Initiative focused on suicide-related deaths.

**Morgue Operations-** Led by the Chief Medical Examiner, this section is responsible for the medicolegal investigation of deaths through comprehensive postmortem examinations. Board-certified forensic pathologists (physicians trained in the subspecialty of forensic pathology) conduct autopsies, determine cause and manner of death, review investigative and clinical records, and produce autopsy reports, which serve as DCOME's final authoritative work product.

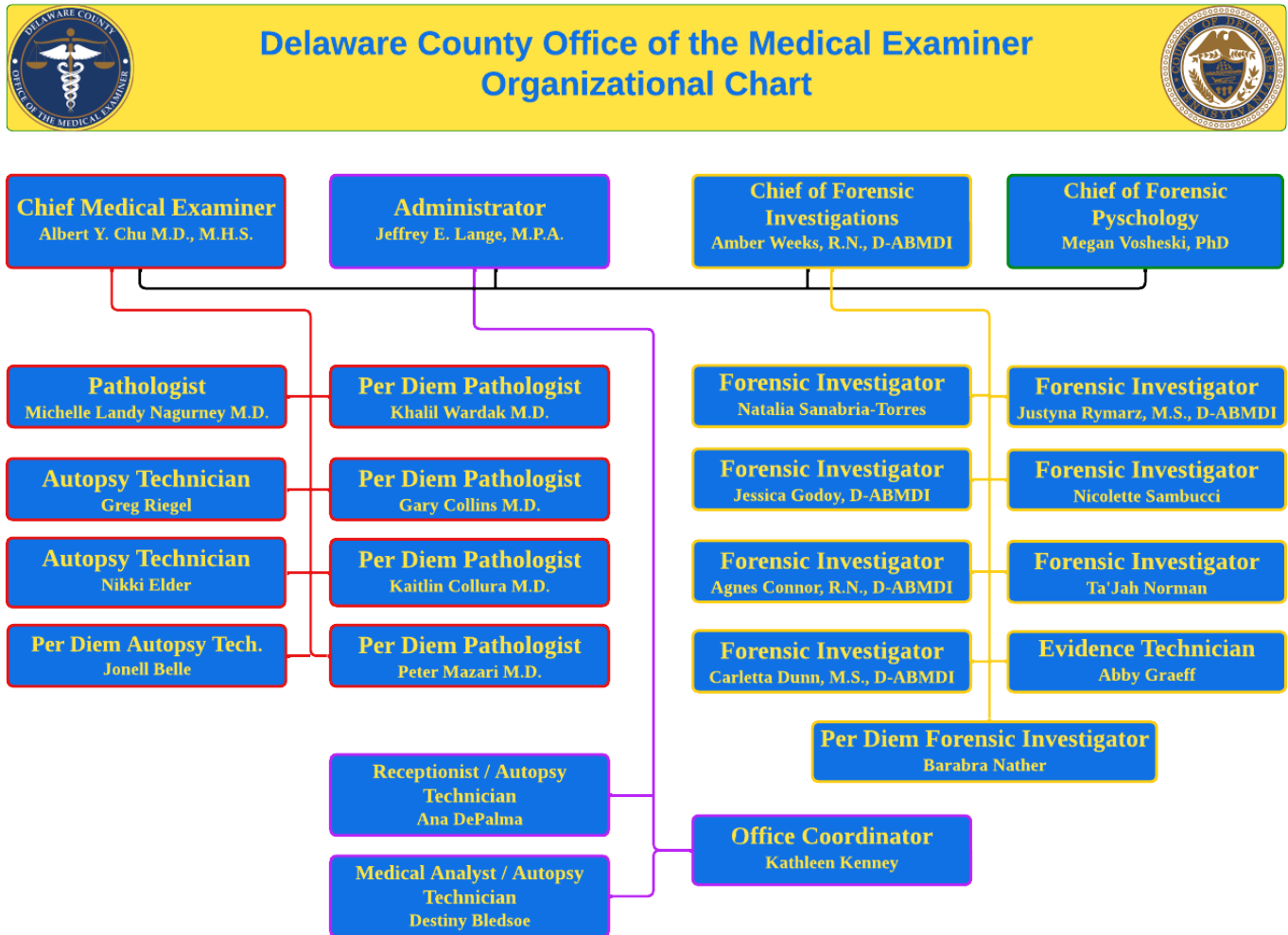
Autopsy technicians provide essential technical assistance in the morgue, including decedent intake, radiography, forensic photography, fingerprinting, and dissection support under the direction of the pathologists.

To ensure the highest level of expertise in complex cases, the Morgue Operations section is supported by a cadre of specialized forensic consultants, including a forensic odontologist, a forensic neuropathologist, and forensic anthropologists.

**Forensic Investigations-** Led by the Chief of Forensic Investigations, a Diplomate of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), this section conducts scene investigations, interviews, evidence collection, and photographic documentation. Investigators assess the circumstances of death, obtain relevant records, and serve as the primary point of contact with families, hospitals, law enforcement, and community partners. They are considered the eyes and ears of the pathologists and are the public-facing representatives of DCOME.

**Evidence Management-**The Evidence Technician is responsible for the secure storage, distribution, and inventory of all collected physical evidence. This role is critical in maintaining the integrity of the chain of custody and supporting both investigative and legal processes.

# Organizational Chart



## Contracted Transportation Services Provided by

- Preston Griffin (First Class Mortuary Transport)

## **Staff Professional Growth**

### **Employee Recognition**

The DCOME is committed to fostering a positive and high-performing workplace culture through its Employee Recognition Program. This quarterly award honors employees who demonstrate initiative, champion change, enhance the quality and efficiency of operations, improve safety practices, mentor and coach new hires, or otherwise go above and beyond their regular duties. Recognized individuals exemplify the core values of professionalism, service, and innovation that define the DCOME.

### **Training**

The DCOME has developed a robust training and professional development program designed to equip employees with the knowledge and skills required for excellence in their respective roles. The program includes both mandatory and elective training components tailored to the unique functions of each division: Forensic Investigations, Morgue Operations (including autopsy technicians and pathologists), Evidence Management, and Administrative Support. Employees have access to over 20 elective-style courses annually and are required to select a specific number based on their position. Additionally, all new hires are required to complete FEMA's Incident Command System (ICS) training within their first year.

The DCOME also supports advanced and specialized training. This year, one investigator started her journey towards her certification in Investigative Genetic Genealogy to assist in the identification of unknown decedents, while another investigator received specialized Osteology training to enhance her expertise in analyzing skeletal remains.

### **Wellness and Mental Health Support**

Working in the medicolegal death investigation field can be both physically and emotionally demanding. The DCOME is committed to supporting the mental health and overall well-being of its staff. To promote resilience and emotional health, a weekly "Peer Support" newsletter is distributed to all employees. This resource offers practical stress management strategies, mental wellness tips, and direct links to counseling and support services.

Additionally, our Chief of Forensic Psychology, a certified mental health counselor, provides on-site support during critical incidents and other high-stress events. This ensures staff have immediate access to professional care and psychological first aid when it is most needed. Our goal is to foster a supportive work environment where all team members feel seen, valued, and equipped to manage the emotional challenges of their work.

## **Meet the Team**



**Dr. Albert Chu** was appointed as the Chief Medical Examiner in October 2023 and leads Morgue Operations, including managing all pathologists, forensic specialists, and autopsy technicians.

Dr. Chu completed undergraduate and graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University and received his medical degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Chu then completed a residency in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital and a fellowship in Forensic Pathology at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for the State of Maryland.

Before becoming Chief Medical Examiner, he served as an Assistant Medical Examiner at the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences in Houston, Texas, and as Deputy Chief Medical Examiner for the City of Philadelphia. He is board certified in anatomic, clinical, and forensic pathology.



**Jeffrey E. Lange** was appointed Administrator of the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in September 2022. In this role, he leads the office's administrative support functions, bringing executive oversight to operations, personnel, and strategic initiatives.

Originally from New Jersey, Mr. Lange is a retired Chief of Police from the State of Maine with a distinguished public safety career spanning more than 30 years. Since 1989, he has served in various capacities including corrections, fire services, and law enforcement, consistently demonstrating a deep commitment to public service. His career also includes international experience, having completed three tours as a Law Enforcement Professional (LEP) in Afghanistan and Iraq with the U.S. Department of Defense.

Mr. Lange holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Administration and a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Columbia Southern University. He also holds several professional certifications, including Certified Six Sigma Lean Black Belt (CSSBB), Society for Human Resource Management – Certified Professional (SHRM-CP), Certified Public Manager (CPM) candidate through Millersville University, with expected completion in June 2025.



**Amber Weeks** was hired in June 2023 as the Chief of Forensic Investigations for the Office of the Medical Examiner. Ms. Weeks leads the Forensic Investigations and evidence sections of the office. She is an ABMDI board certified Forensic Investigator.

Before joining the DCOME, Ms. Weeks served as an investigator at the State of New Jersey Southern Regional Medical Examiner's Office. She is also a registered nurse in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and holds a license in forensic nursing in New Jersey, a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with a Crime Scene Investigations certification from the University of Central Florida, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Drexel University, and is currently completing her studies towards her Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree through Hawai'i Pacific University. Ms. Weeks will obtain her Executive Leadership certificate from Villanova University through the CLIMB leadership program in 2024 for Emergency Management professionals in Delaware County, PA.



**Megan Vosheski** was hired in April 2024 as the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner's bereavement coordinator. In January 2025, Mrs. Vosheski was promoted to Chief of Forensic Psychology. Originally from New Jersey, she has a background in behavioral health and forensic psychology and extensive experience in counseling and program development. She has established Delaware County's first bereavement counseling program and developed the Office of the Medical Examiner's Psychological Autopsy Initiative. Mrs. Vosheski holds a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Health from Drexel University and a Master of Science in

Forensic Psychology from Walden University. She is finishing her PhD in Forensic Psychology/Criminology at Keiser University.

**Greg Riegel** was hired in June 2006 by the County of Delaware. In 2015, Mr. Riegel transferred to the DCOME as an Autopsy Technician. Mr. Riegel is a skilled and dedicated employee with a meticulous approach to postmortem examinations. He plays a crucial role in supporting the forensic pathologists, and is also responsible for maintaining morgue operations, including documenting cases, submitting toxicology, fingerprinting unidentified decedents, and assisting with updating policies. Mr. Riegel is the AFSCME Shop Steward for the office. Mr. Riegel is also a veteran; he served in the United States Navy as an aviation electrician and aviation intermediate maintenance level repair and spent 10 years serving our county.

**Jessica Godoy** was hired in June of 2022 as a Forensic Investigator. She received her bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences with a focus on Health Sciences from Arizona State University. Ms. Godoy is an ABMDI board certified Medicolegal Death Investigator, with a specialized focus on unidentified remains and unknown decedents. Additionally, Ms. Godoy works frequently as an autopsy technician at DCOME. Ms. Godoy hopes to continue her education in medical school to fulfill a career in emergency medicine or forensic pathology.

**Destiny Bledsoe** was hired in November of 2022 as a Receptionist, and was promoted to Medical Analyst in March of 2024. In addition to her regular duties, Destiny has demonstrated exceptional dedication by pursuing certification as an autopsy technician and expanding her skill set to contribute directly to the forensic investigation process. Complementing her practical experience, Destiny is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in General Studies at Delaware County Community College. She plans to pursue pre-medical studies, with the ultimate goal of becoming a forensic pathologist.

**Justyna Rymarz** was hired in January of 2023 as a Forensic Investigator for the Office of the Delaware County Medical Examiner. Justyna earned her master's degree in Forensic Medicine from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, laying the groundwork for her career in death investigation. Ms. Rymarz is an ABMDI board-certified investigator. As a dual citizen of Poland and the United States, her international perspective gives her a deep appreciation of diversity in all its forms. This also assists with effective communication with different communities / nationalities and bridges cultural gaps in her work. In addition to her role as a death investigator, Justyna brings a diverse background in various professions, including rehabilitation, real estate, and investing. Justyna enjoys hiking, traveling, and spending time with her family outside of work.

**Carletta Dunn** was hired in February of 2023 as a Forensic Investigator with the County of Delaware Office of the Medical Examiner. Ms. Carley Dunn, professionally known as Carletta, is a dedicated forensic professional with a solid scientific background. Ms. Tiano holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology from Temple University and a Master of Science Degree in Forensic Medicine from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM). Ms. Tiano is a board-certified American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigator (ABMDI). She leads the Child Death Review Board for SUID (Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths) for the office. She is currently working on a project to examine and enhance standard practices and guidelines in nursing training within public health settings for SUID. Ms. Tiano is deeply passionate about Forensic Medicine and aspires to attend medical school to become a Forensic Pathologist.

**Agnes Connor** was hired as a full-time Forensic Investigator in February of 2023. Before her current role, Ms. Connor was a contracted employee for the DCOME, fulfilling duties as an autopsy technician and

subsequently as a forensic investigator since 2016. In addition to being an ABMDI board-certified Medicolegal Death Investigator, Ms. Connor has also over two decades of experience as an emergency room nurse.

**Nicolette Sambucci** was hired in February 2024 as the Evidence Technician. Ms. Sambucci completed her Bachelor of Arts and Science degree at The University of Tennessee, where she double majored in Forensic Anthropology and Criminology/ Criminal Justice. This upcoming year, Ms. Sambucci will start working towards her master's degree in Forensic Science with a concentration in Forensic DNA/ Genealogy. Currently Ms. Sambucci is enrolled at Ramapo College obtaining her certification in Investigative Genetic Genealogy. One of her goals is to become a certified Forensic Investigator for the Office of the Medical Examiner.

**Dr. Michelle Nagurney** was hired in March of 2024 as a Forensic Pathologist. Dr. Nagurney is board certified in anatomic and forensic pathology from the American Board of Pathology. Before coming to Delaware County, she was a fellow in forensic pathology at the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner and subsequently worked at the Philadelphia Medical Examiner's Office as an Associate Medical Examiner. She obtained her medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Her forensic interests include child and maternal fatalities, and she has participated in co-sleeping and neonatal infectious disease research.

**Ta'jah Norman** was hired in May of 2024 as a Forensic Investigator for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice with a specialized interest in forensics. Ms. Norman is currently working to obtain her board certification as a Medicolegal Death Investigator. While working at DCOME, Ms. Norman has become a member of the Violent Death Review Board and the Safety Committee. Ms. Norman has a specialized interest in domestic violence and sex crimes with plans of incorporating this into her career down the line. When outside of work, Ms. Norman spends time with her animals that includes her cats and a bearded dragon. Additionally, she enjoys watching movies and doing crafts such as embroidery.

**Nikki Eller** was hired in July 2024 as an Autopsy Technician. She is currently enrolled in the Autopsy Technician Certification Program at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (P.I.T.). With over 13 years of experience in the medical field, Nikki has served in various EMS roles across both Philadelphia and Delaware County. She spent two years working at Lankenau Hospital and currently works per diem as an ER Tech in the Emergency Department at Riddle Hospital.

**Natalia Sanabria Torres** was hired in July 2024 as a Forensic Investigator. She received her Bachelor of Science in Biological Anthropology with a minor in Psychology from Penn State

University. Natalia has a specialized focus in unidentified remains and works alongside her colleagues to resolve cold cases. Additionally, Natalia is a bilingual speaker, acting as the main point of contact for all cases involving Spanish-speaking families and individuals. Natalia hopes to continue her career working with unidentified remains and collaborating with other agencies to reduce the number of unidentified people.

**Ana DePalma** was hired as the office Receptionist in August of 2024. A native of New Jersey and now proud Delaware County resident, Ana holds a bachelor's degree in Criminology from West Virginia University. She is currently pursuing her Autopsy Technician Certification at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology. Ana is actively cross-training within the department to transition into a full-time autopsy technician role. Her academic background, dedication to public service, and strong interest in medicolegal investigations make her a valuable addition to the team and a promising future technician for the office.

**Abigail Graeff** was hired in September 2024 as the Evidence Technician. Ms. Graeff started as an extern at the DCOME in the summer of 2024 while completing her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from West Chester University. Ms. Graeff is part of the Mass Fatality Review board specializing in response guidelines and strategic planning in mass fatality events. Ms. Graeff also is cross training in forensic investigations. Ms. Graeff enjoys spending time with her friends and family, going on vacations, and coaching high school girl's lacrosse.

**Kathleen Kenney** was hired in May 2024 by the Delaware County Health Department and transferred to the DCOME in February of 2025 as the Office Coordinator. Kathleen has over 20 years' experience in the customer service and administrative fields. Kathleen is also an educational advocate for individuals with disabilities, demonstrating a passion for helping others and making a positive impact.





## **Budget, Capital, and Grant-Funded Projects**

The operating budget for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) in **2024** was **\$2,233,911**, representing a **13.68% decrease** from the 2023 fiscal year. This reduction was achieved through strategic reorganization and improved hiring practices, specifically transitioning from reliance on per diem pathologists to full-time employed forensic pathologists. This shift enhanced operational continuity and resulted in notable cost savings.

The **Morgue Operations Division** accounts for the majority of the operating budget, reflecting high costs associated with medical and scientific functions. Major expenditures include:

- Salaries and benefits for board-certified forensic pathologists
- Pathology examinations and autopsy procedures

- Scientific testing, including toxicology and histology
- Medical and laboratory supplies

The DCOME operates in a manner comparable to healthcare institutions, with significant investments in specialized personnel, diagnostic tools, and laboratory infrastructure necessary for medicolegal investigations.

### **Capital Funded Purchases**

There were **no capital-funded expenditures** in 2024.

### **Grant-Funded Equipment**

In 2024, DCOME was awarded a **\$95,054** grant from the **Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance**. The funds will be used over the next three years to enhance operational capacity through the following equipment purchases:

- **Three forensic microscopes** (average cost: **\$12,836–\$14,689** each)
- **Software system upgrades** for case and data management (**\$10,000**)
- **CO-Oximeter analyzer** for rapid measurement of blood carboxyhemoglobin (**\$16,700**)
- **Turnout gear** for forensic investigators entering fire-related scenes (**\$15,318**)

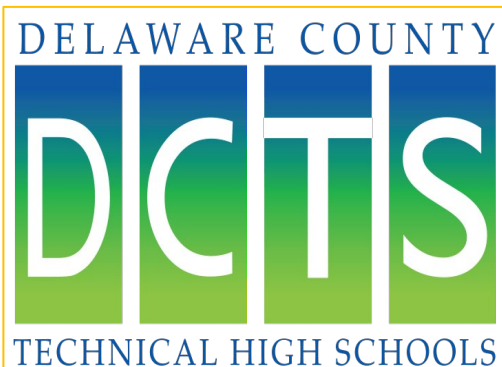
These enhancements reflect the DCOME’s continued commitment to operational excellence, evidence-based practice, and workforce safety.

### **Professional Partnerships**

The DCOME has maintained its ongoing paid work agreement with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s Department of Public Health, Office of Drug Surveillance and Misuse Prevention. Under this multi-year agreement, the DCOME submits biannual statistical reports on drug-related deaths to support the Commonwealth’s statewide surveillance, prevention, and intervention strategies.

In exchange, Delaware County receives \$10,000 annually, which is allocated to the County’s general fund. This collaboration not only strengthens Pennsylvania’s data-driven public health efforts but also reinforces the critical role of medicolegal death investigation in informing policy and supporting local government resources.





The DCOME has a partnership with the Delaware County Technical School (DCIU) to expand educational opportunities for high school juniors and seniors enrolled in medical career programs. Through this initiative, students are granted supervised access to observe adult autopsies, offering them a rare and valuable glimpse into the field of forensic medicine.

This real-world experience deepens students' understanding of human anatomy, pathology, and the role of medical examiners in the broader healthcare and public safety systems. The program supports career exploration and inspires the next generation of healthcare and forensic science professionals.

The DCOME has also partnered with the Delaware County Health Department and the Delaware County Department of Human Services to support a range of multidisciplinary death review initiatives. Established in November 2022, this collaboration remains active and continues to grow in scope and impact.



The DCOME plays an active role on the steering committee for the County's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), contributing medicolegal expertise to public health strategies aimed at improving community outcomes. The partnership also provides critical insight into various types of death reviews, including:

- Child death reviews
- Suicide reviews
- Overdose fatality reviews
- Violent death reviews
- Motor vehicle fatality reviews

These collaborative efforts ensure that fatalities are examined through both public health and forensic lenses, enabling more effective prevention strategies, informed policy development, and a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to avoidable deaths in the county.

The DCOME has a collaborative partnership with the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (PIT) to provide Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) students with hands-on clinical experience in a forensic setting. As part of their clinical rotations, PIT students work alongside DCOME's pathologists three days per week, gaining valuable exposure to forensic medicine, postmortem care, and medico-legal procedures.



This partnership enhances the educational experience of nursing students by offering a unique perspective on the intersection of healthcare, pathology, and public service, while also fostering interest in specialized fields such as forensic nursing and death investigation.



The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) maintains a strong and ongoing partnership with Gift of Life, an organization committed to coordinating the recovery of organs and tissues for transplantation. The donation and transplant process is inherently complex, requiring seamless collaboration among medical examiners, healthcare providers, investigative teams, and

transplant specialists.

Through this partnership, DCOME works closely with Gift of Life to ensure that each potential opportunity for donation is approached with compassion, professionalism, and the utmost respect. By supporting this mission, DCOME helps provide hope to recipients and families while honoring the selfless decisions of donors and their loved ones.



### **The PA Healthcare Preparedness Program and the Southeast Healthcare Coalition**

These coalitions are defined as “a formal collaboration among healthcare organizations and public and private partners organized to prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency, mass casualty, or catastrophic event” (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, DOH, 2022). The DCOME has been a member in good standing with both organizations and recently benefited from the generous loan of a portable X-ray machine, an urgently needed asset. Previously, DCOME relied on a third-party provider to conduct all postmortem radiographs. The loaned machine, valued at nearly \$45,000, enhances our operational capabilities and will be deployed regionally in the event of mass fatality incidents.

Lastly, the DCOME)has reestablished and strengthened professional working relationships with key partner agencies, including the Delaware County Office of the District Attorney, Delaware County Police Chiefs Association, Delaware County 911 Center, Delaware County Emergency Management, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency, the Delaware County Regional EMS Office, local hospital systems, and numerous funeral and cremation service providers across Delaware and surrounding counties. These partnerships are essential to ensuring coordinated response, effective communication, and high standards of service across the region.



## **Data Sharing and Interagency Collaboration**

As part of its commitment to public service and community health, the DCOME shares statistical data with various government agencies at both the county and state levels, as well as with non-governmental and civic organizations. This data includes information on:

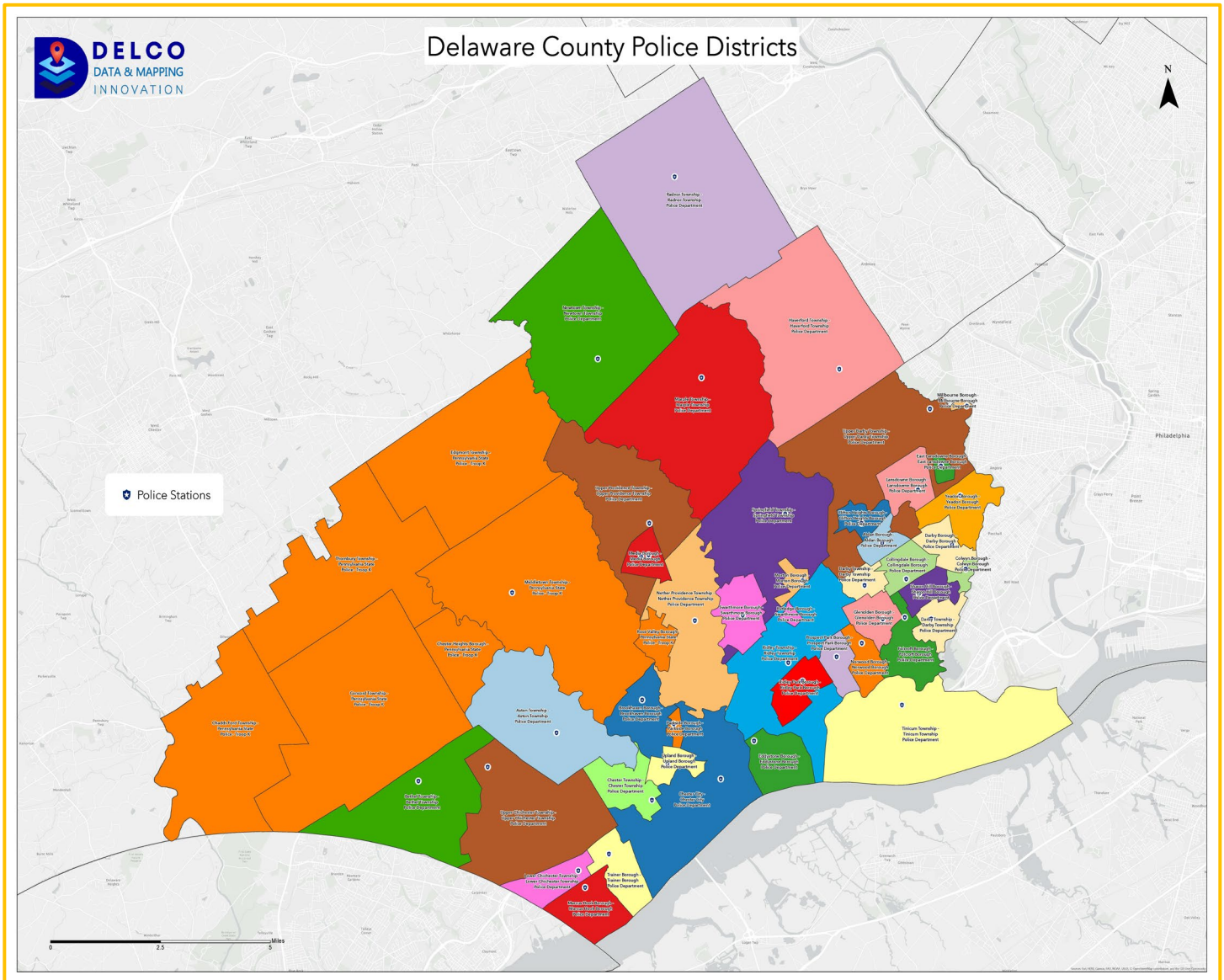
- Drug-related deaths
- Firearm-related fatalities
- Suicides
- Infant and child deaths
- Other significant public health indicators

These data-sharing partnerships play a critical role in evidence-based decision-making. By providing timely and accurate data, the DCOME supports the development of targeted prevention strategies, informs outreach efforts, enhances safety planning, guides adjustments to service delivery, and contributes to the formulation and revision of public policy.



## Jurisdictions We Support

The DCOME provides services to all 50 jurisdictions within the County. The office collaborates closely with 42 municipal police departments, the Pennsylvania State Police, the Delaware County District Attorney's Office, and the County's Criminal Investigative Division (CID). In addition, the DCOME supports all hospital systems and numerous nursing homes throughout the county, ensuring comprehensive medicolegal services across a wide network of healthcare and law enforcement partners.



## **Community Involvement**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner participated or assisted in community-sponsored events in Delaware County. Some included the Toys 4Tots Toy Drive, the Delaware County Health Department Food Drive, and Touch-a-Truck Halloween celebration at the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology.



## **Future Opportunities for 2025**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) is actively expanding its community outreach efforts to increase awareness and improve compliance with mandatory death reporting requirements. Planned initiatives include targeted educational programs for hospitals, hospice agencies, nursing homes, and the general public, as well as specialized awareness training for law enforcement, EMS personnel, and fire departments across Delaware County.

In addition, the DCOME continues to play a key role in regional mass fatality preparedness, working in close collaboration with Delaware County Emergency Management, the Southeast Healthcare Coalition, and the Delaware County Healthcare Emergency Preparedness Group. These partnerships are essential to strengthening the county's capacity to respond to large-scale fatality events with coordinated, effective strategies.

The DCOME is also enhancing its efforts to address missing persons and unidentified decedents. Led by the agency's Investigative Division, these initiatives focus on improving the notification process, leveraging advances in forensic technology, and expanding engagement with both community members and law enforcement agencies. The goal is to increase identification rates and bring closure to families impacted by unresolved cases.

## **Bereavement Office**

### **Sincere Words**

We encourage you to consider attending grief counseling and support groups during this incredibly difficult time. Grief has no set timeline, and everyone experiences it differently. It's important to remember that, with time and support, you may begin to find moments of peace and healing at your own pace. You are not alone—help is available as you navigate this journey.

### **Our Services**

Delaware County extends its deepest condolences to you and your loved ones during this time of profound loss. When you feel ready, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner is here to offer resources, support, and guidance to help you navigate the days ahead. Our Chief of Forensic Psychology, Megan Vosheski, is available to provide individualized counseling, connect you with specialized programs, and recommend additional agencies that can support you during this difficult transition. Please see the next couple of pages for resources that may assist you.

Please do not hesitate to reach out at 484-750-2150. We are here for you.

# **Grief and Bereavement Support Groups**

## **Children Impacted by Grief**

- *Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH)*  
267-469-3002

[YEAHPhilly – Reaching Philly Teens the Right Way](#)

- *Urban Youth Leadership Academy*  
215-204-8917
- *Uplift Center for Grieving Children*  
267-437-3123

[Uplift Philly – Uplift Center for Grieving Children](#)



## **Outpatient Agencies in Delaware County**

- *Holcomb Behavioral Services*  
126 E. Baltimore Pike, Media, PA

Hotline number 484-444-0412 can gain general information

Website-[www.chimes.org/about/chimes-family/Holcomb-behavioral-health-systems/](http://www.chimes.org/about/chimes-family/Holcomb-behavioral-health-systems/)

Call to schedule an intake appointment for services to begin. Fees might apply office does take select providers.

- *Thrive Works Counseling*  
Hotline 610-808-9923  
Website [www.thriveworks.com/media-counseling/](http://www.thriveworks.com/media-counseling/) you can find information, fees, and providers offered. Call to schedule an intake appointment for services to begin. Fees might apply. The office does take select providers.

- *Family and Community Service*  
600 N. Olive Street, Media PA  
610-566-7540
- *Glen Mills Counseling Center*  
485 Baltimore Pike, Suite 201,  
Glen Mills PA

Or

210 W. Front St. Media PA  
610-656-1424

## **National Suicide Prevention Hotline**

- *1-800-273-TALK*  
24-hour hotline if you or someone you know is considering an act of suicide, experiencing trauma caused by losing a loved one to suicide
- *Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital Crisis Center* 610-237-4210

- *Survivors of Suicide, Inc*  
215-545-2242  
[www.sosphilly.org](http://www.sosphilly.org)
- *Crozer Chester Mental Health Crisis Center* 610-447-7600
- *Healthy Minds (Phila. BHIDS)*  
215-685-6444 (24/7)
- <https://healthymindsphilly.org/>
- *NAMI Bucks County PA*  
215-343-3055  
<http://namibuckspa.org/>
- *Center for Grief and Bereavement*  
610-222-4110  
<http://bereavementcenter.org/>

### **Suicide Resources (Trained Persons to Help)**

- *Greater Philadelphia*  
610-649-5250
- *Prevent Suicide PA- Delaware County Task Force*  
[Delaware County - Prevent Suicide PA](http://Delaware County - Prevent Suicide PA)
- *Delco Suicide Prevention Org*  
[delcosuicideprevention.org](http://delcosuicideprevention.org)
- *Delaware County Crisis Connection*  
855-889-7827  
24/7 emergency aid



### **Support Groups for Families impacted by Homicide**

- *Victim's Compensation Program*  
24-hour hotline- 610-566-4342  
Possible reimbursement of expenses. Funeral arrangements, medical bills, etc. Victims Assistance Advocate appointed; attend court appearances, compensation status.
- *Parents of Murdered Children*  
484-557-1370
- *Mothers in Charge*  
215-228-1718
- *Operation Save our City*  
856-745-6045
- *Healing Hurt People*  
215-762-1177
- *Court Financial Services*  
610-891-5060
- *Network of Neighbors Responding to Violence*  
267-233-4387
- *AVP's hotline of murder victims*  
215-686-8033

### **Delaware County Mental Health Services**

- *Mental Health Office*  
20 S. 69<sup>th</sup> Street, Upper Darby, PA  
19082  
610-713-2365

### **Peters Place**

A Center for Grieving Children and Families  
336 King of Prussia Rd., Radnor, PA  
19087- 610-687-515

## 2024 Delaware County Statistics

It is important to remember that each statistic in this report represents a human life lost leaving behind grieving families, friends, and communities. Our hope, as always, is that by understanding these trends, policymakers, public health officials, and professionals across healthcare and public safety can work together to create informed strategies that protect lives and promote community well-being.

### Understanding the 5 Manners of Death

**Natural-** Death that occurs from a disease, illness, medical condition or failure of body functions due to age.

•Ex: Heart Attack, Stroke, Cancer, Etc..

**Accident-** Death that occurs from an unintentional injury or event.

•Ex: Car Accident, Fall, Drowning, Etc..

**Suicide-** Death that occurs when an individual intentionally takes their own life.

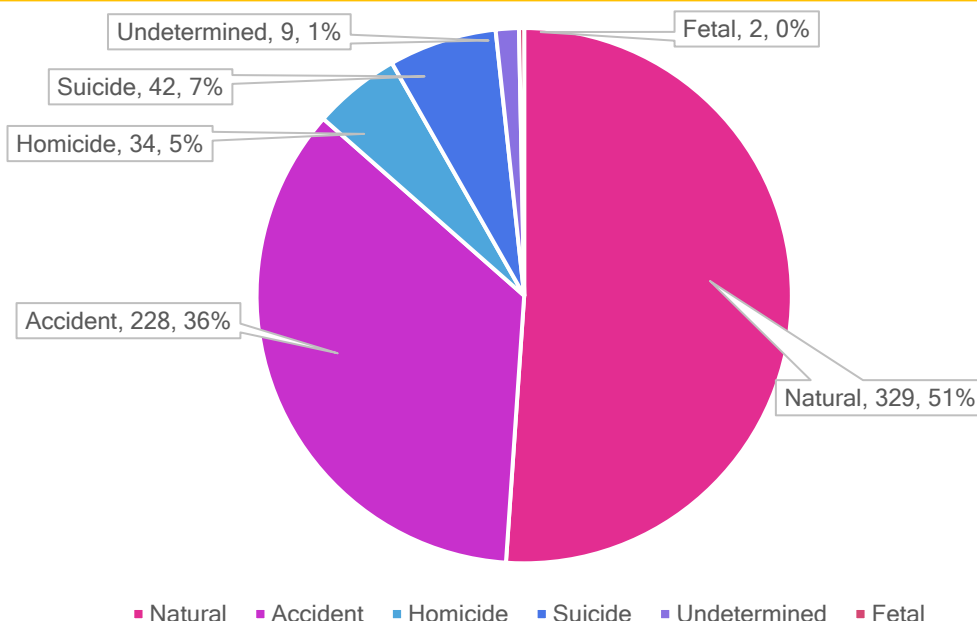
•Ex: Hanging, Self-inflicted Gun Shot Wound, Exsanguination from cutting, Etc..

**Homicide-** Death that occurs when one individual kills another.

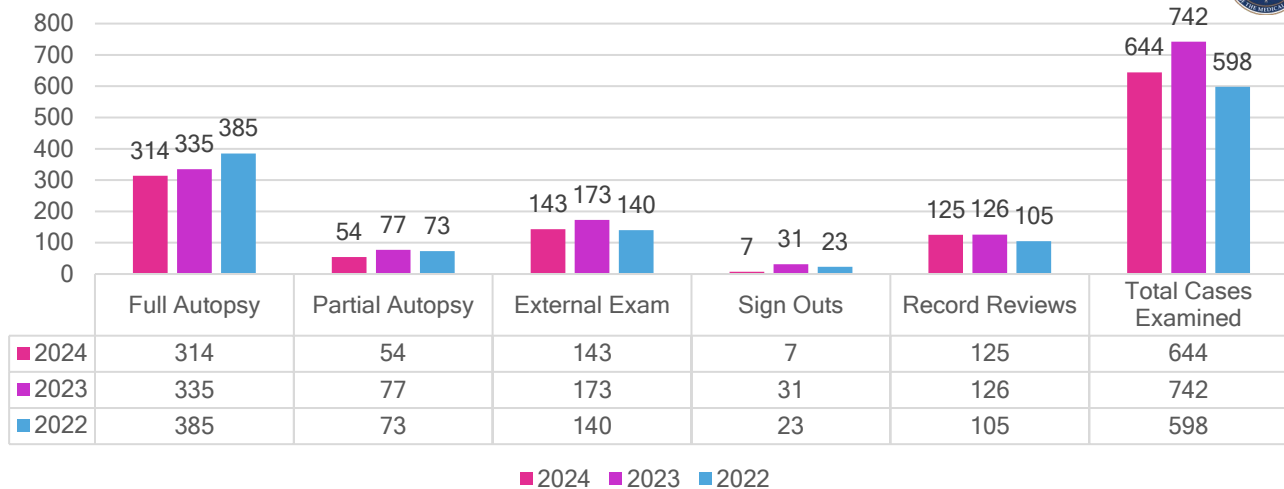
•Ex: Shooting a person that results in their death, Etc...

**Undetermined-** When a death cannot be definitively classified.

•Ex: Ambiguous information surrounding the death, Inconclusive evidence, Etc..

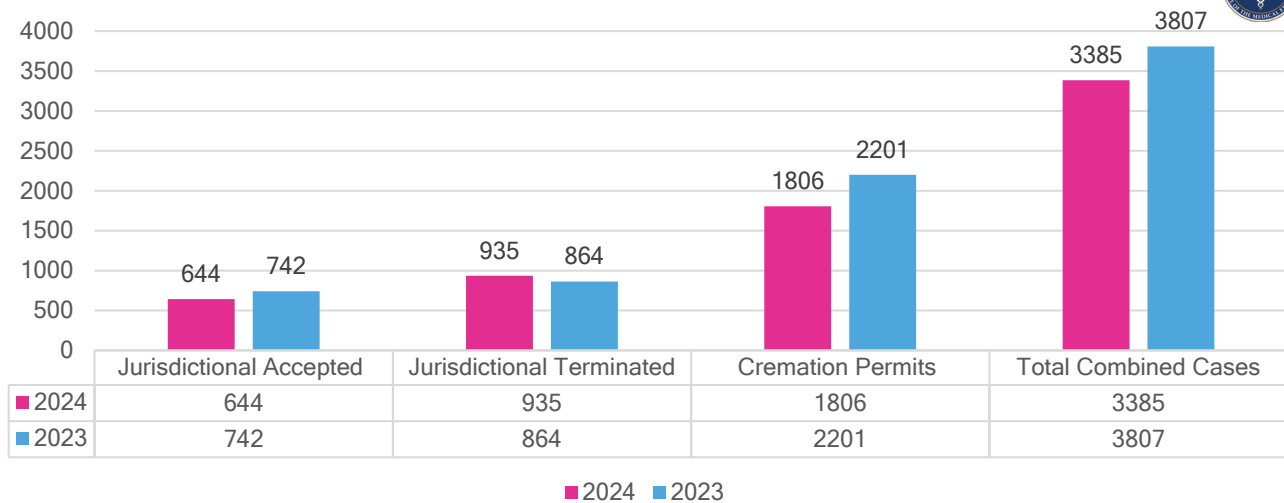


## 2024 DCOME Types of Examinations



\*\* In 2022 and 2023 record reviews & Sign outs were completed however, some of those figures are unavailable.

## 2024 DCOME Total Cases Investigated



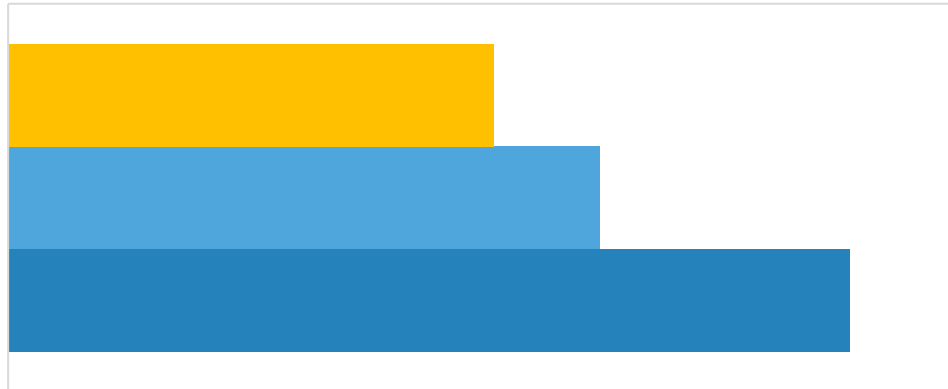
Both Jurisdictional and Terminated cases are all investigated along with a review of the cremation permits requests.

## 2024 DCOME Cremation Permits



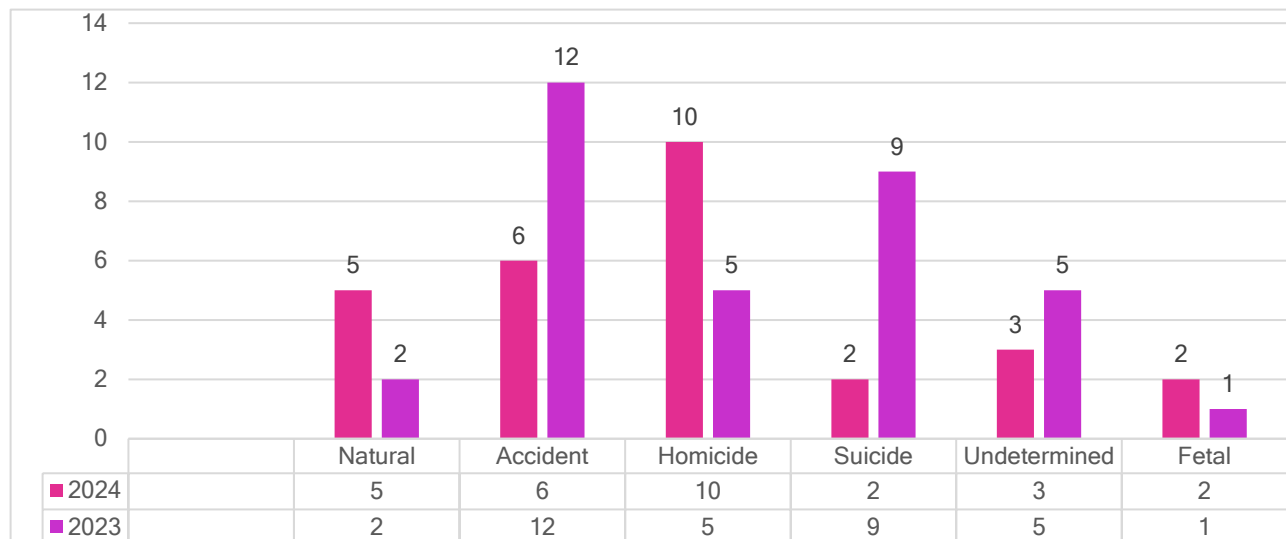
■ 2024 ■ 2023 ■ 2022

CREMATIONS PERMITS

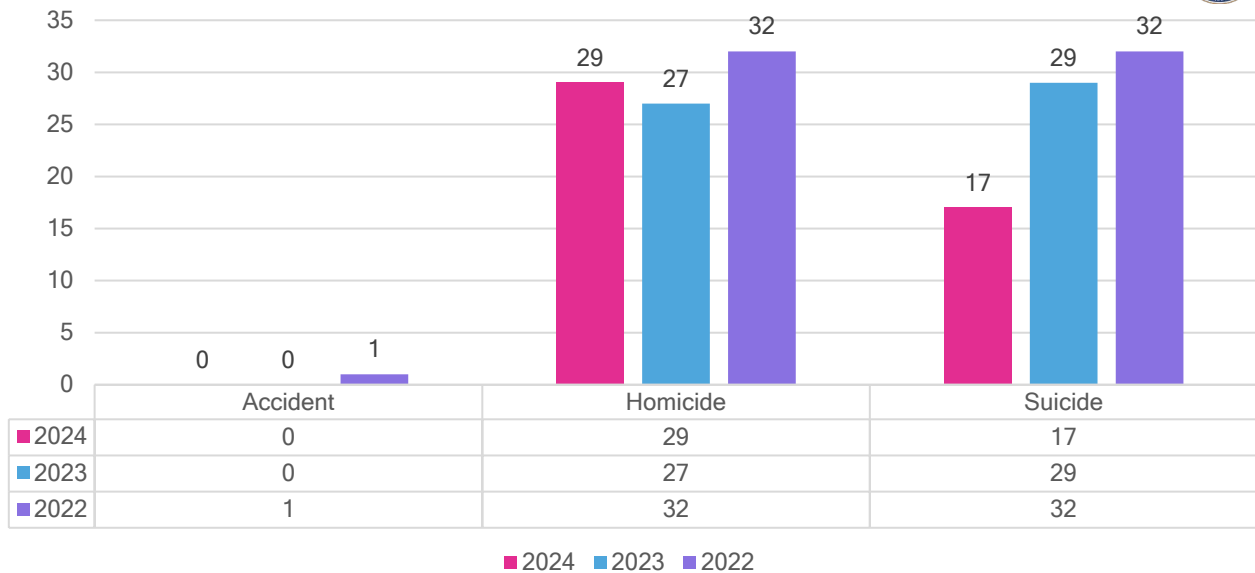


	Cremations Permits
■ 2024	1806
■ 2023	2201
■ 2022	3133

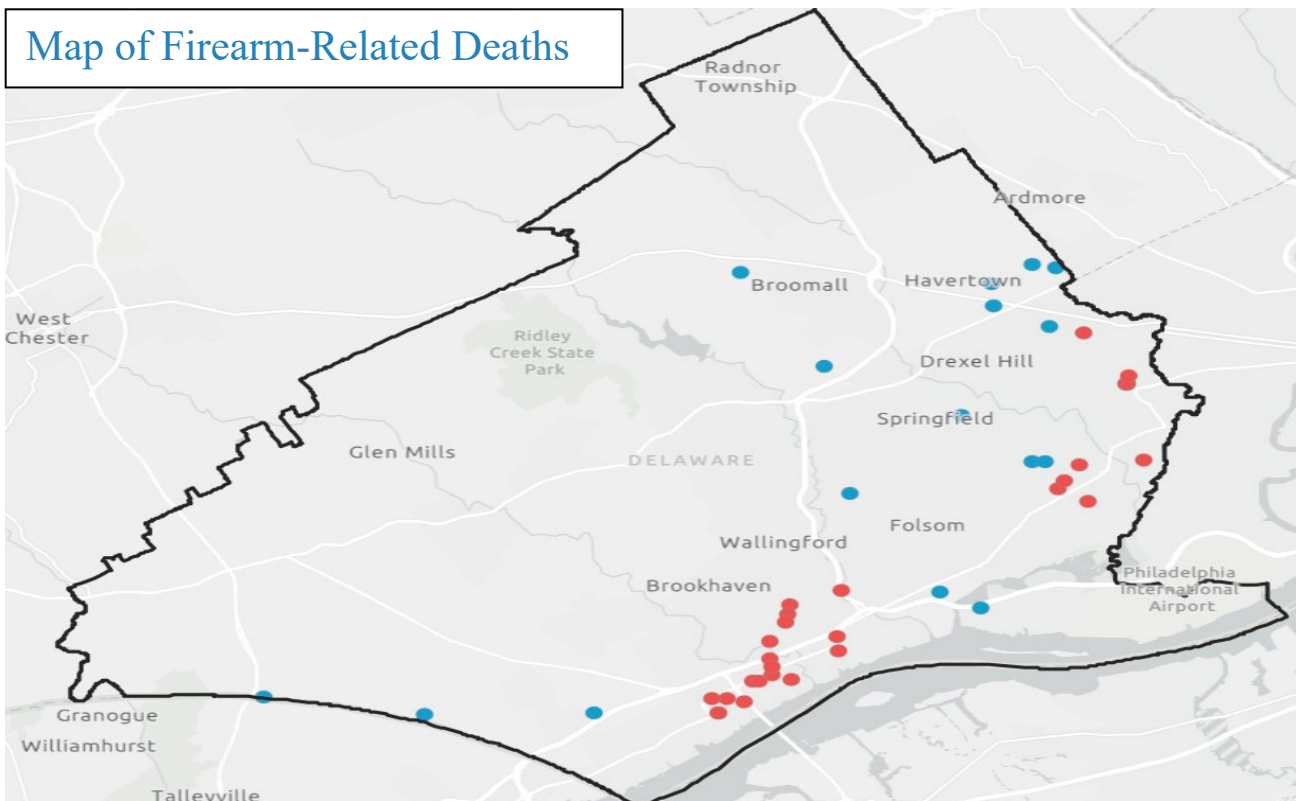
## 2024 DCOME Deaths, 21 years and younger



## 2024 DCOME Firearm Related Deaths

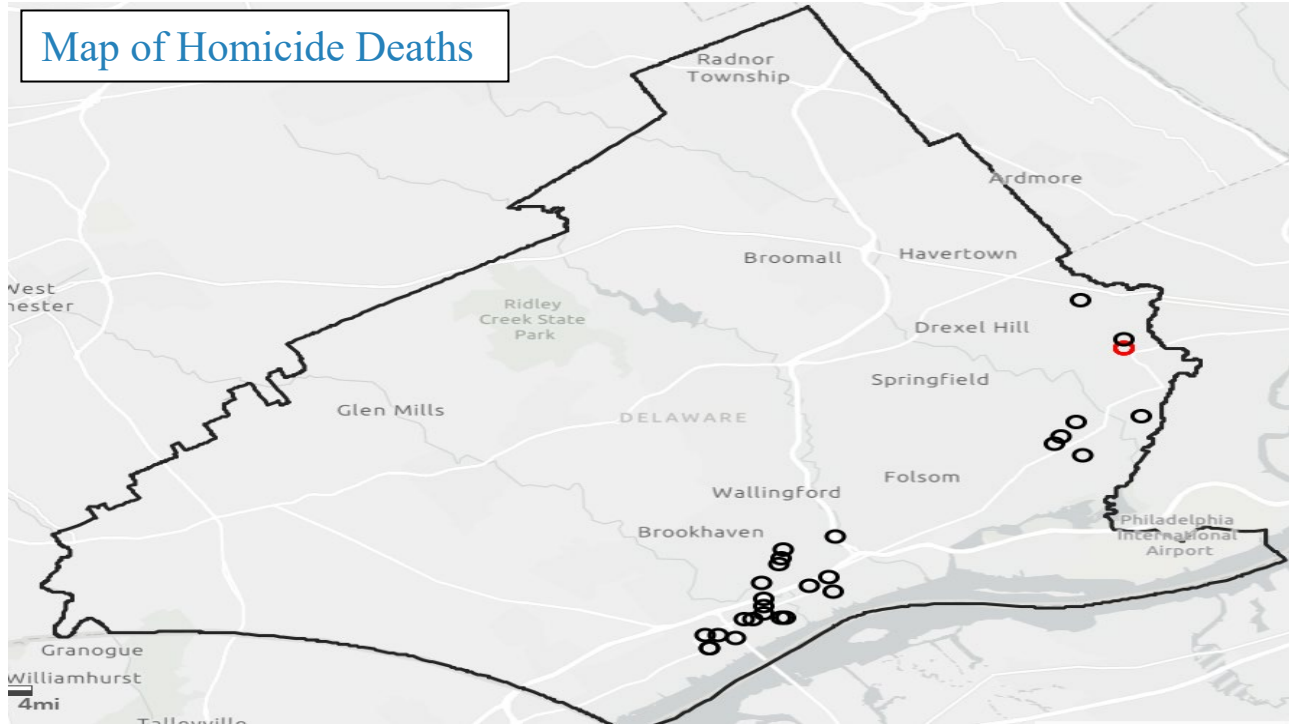


## Map of Firearm-Related Deaths



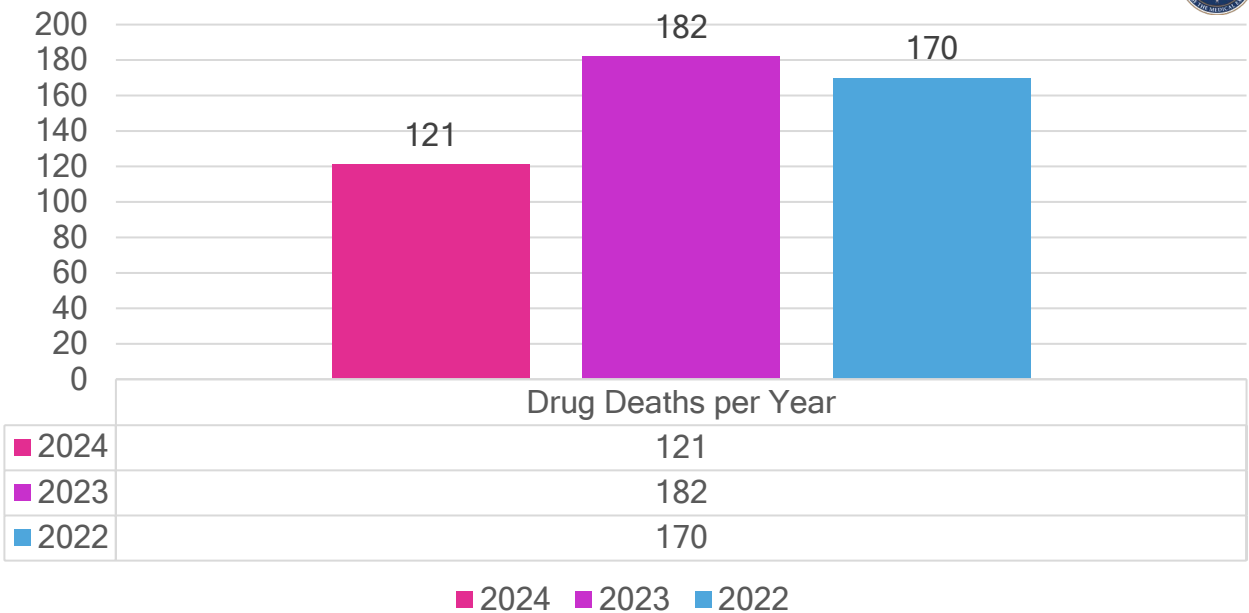
- Red: Homicides
- Blue: Suicides

## Map of Homicide Deaths

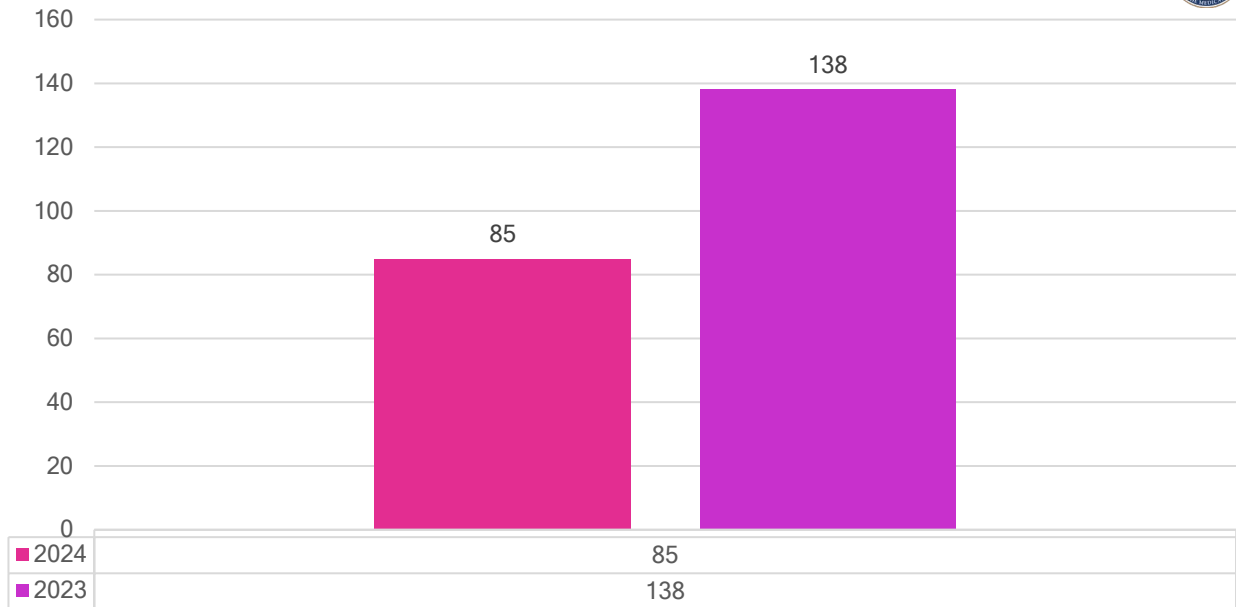


- 2 / 34 deaths could not be mapped as the location of their injuries is unknown
- Red Circle- location of five (5) homicides in a single incident

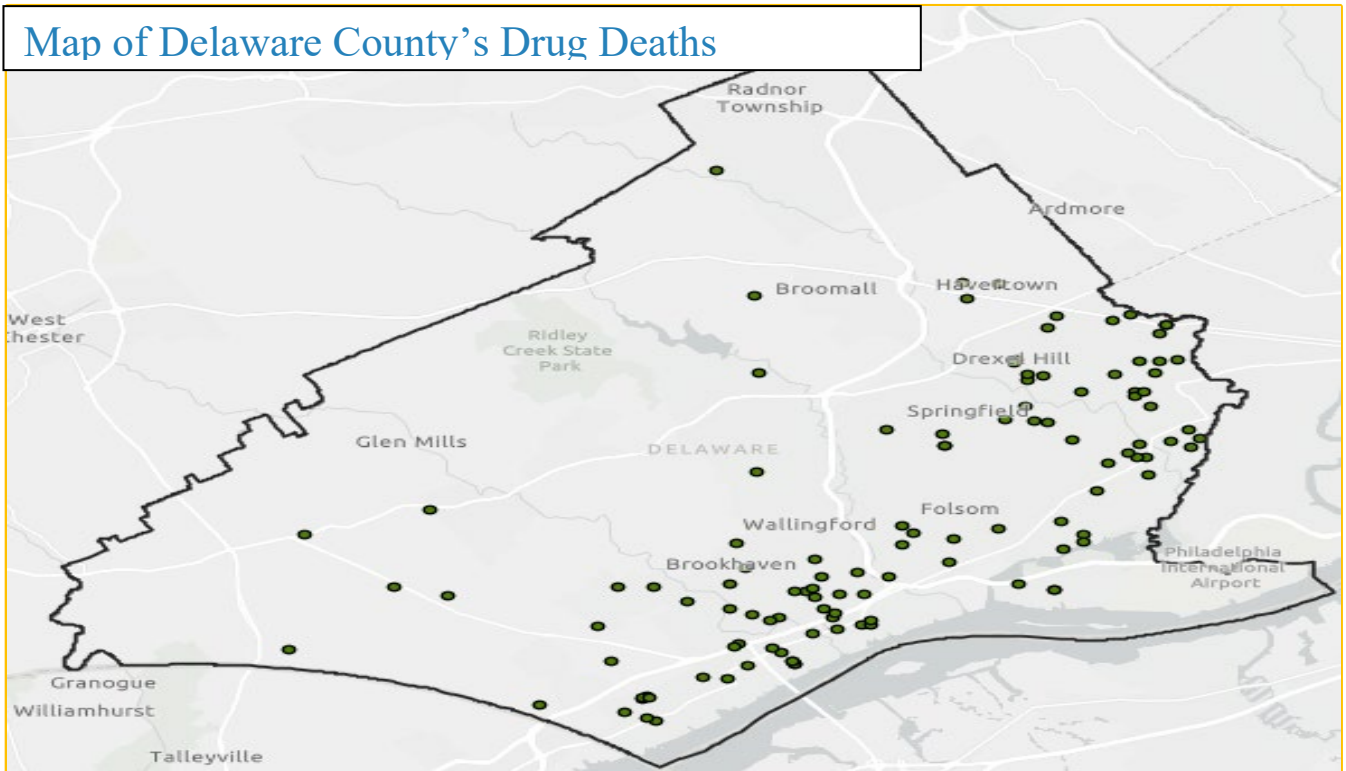
## DCOME Drug Deaths by Year



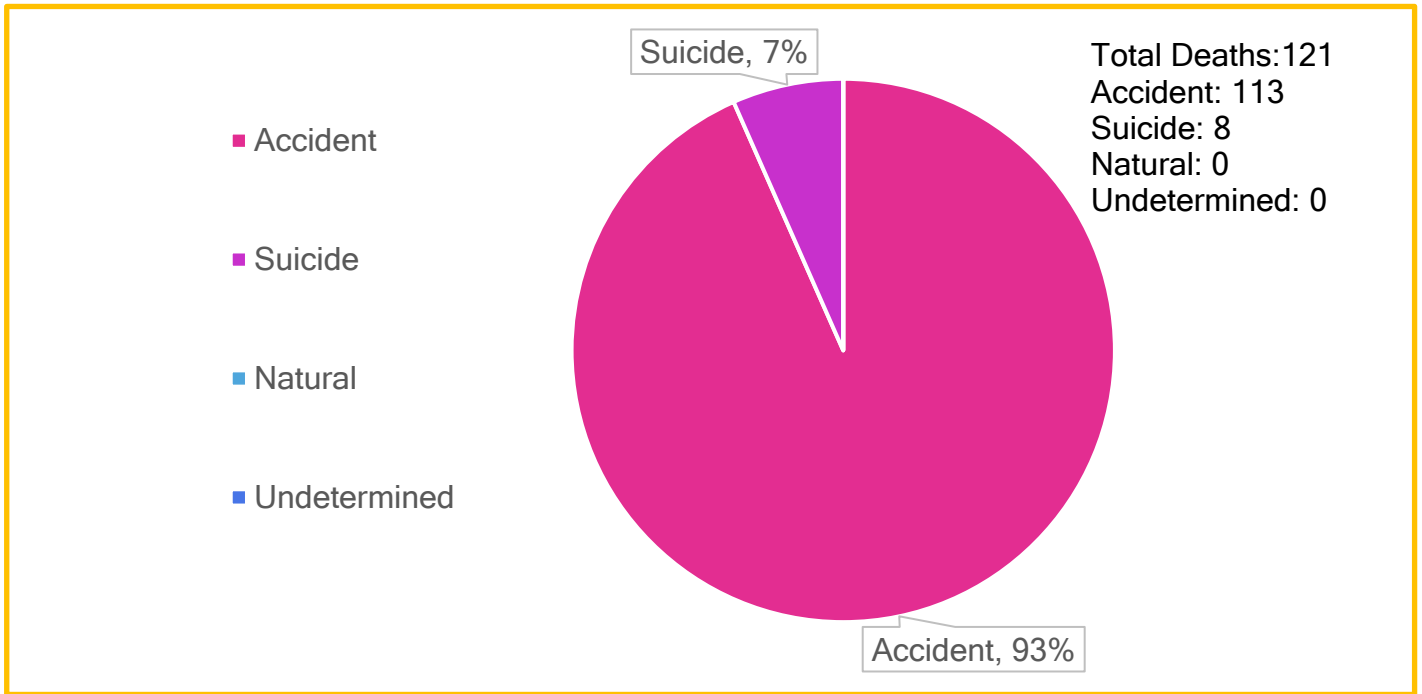
## DCOME Fentanyl and Xylazine Combo Deaths



## Map of Delaware County's Drug Deaths

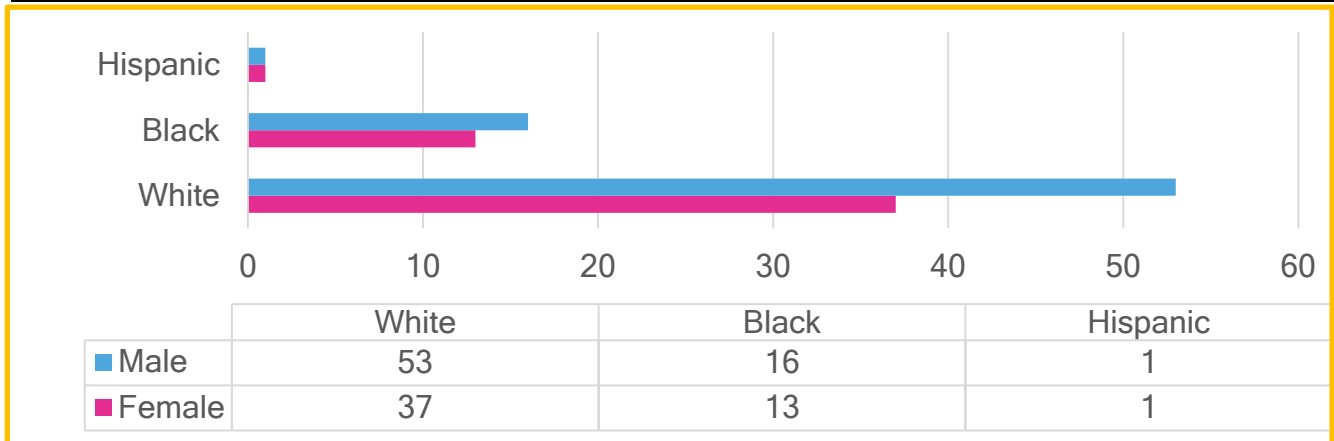


## 2024 DCOME Drug related deaths by Manner

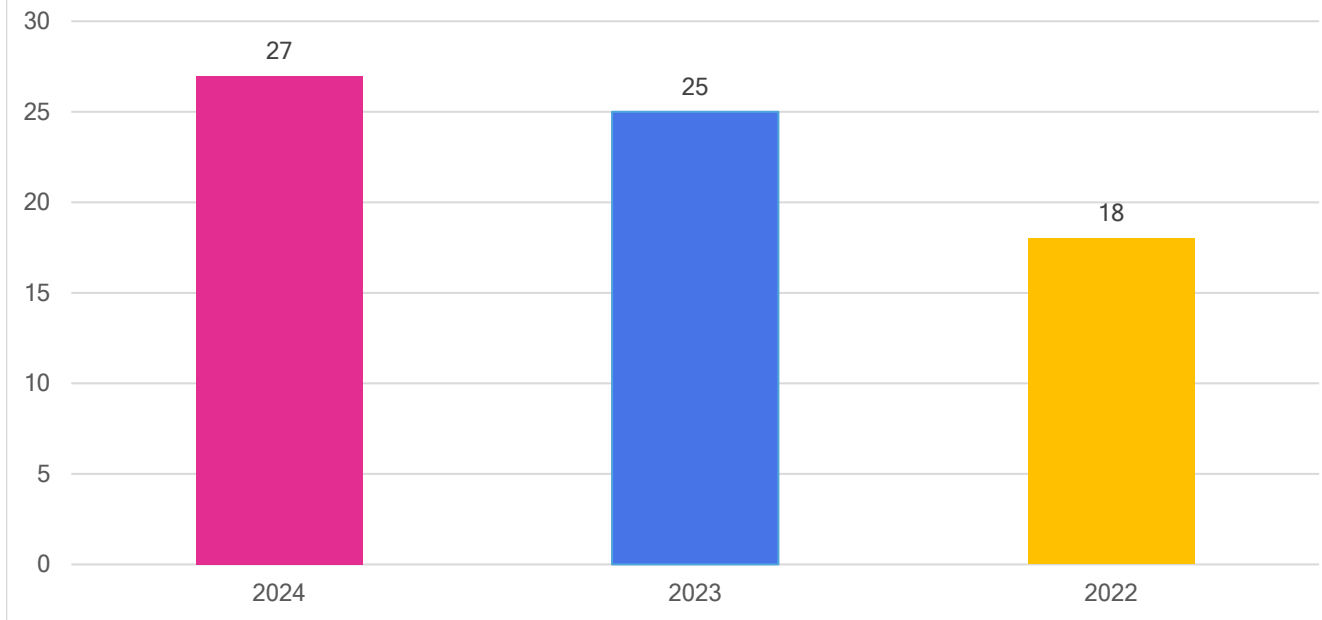


## 2024 DCOME Drug related deaths by Sex & Race

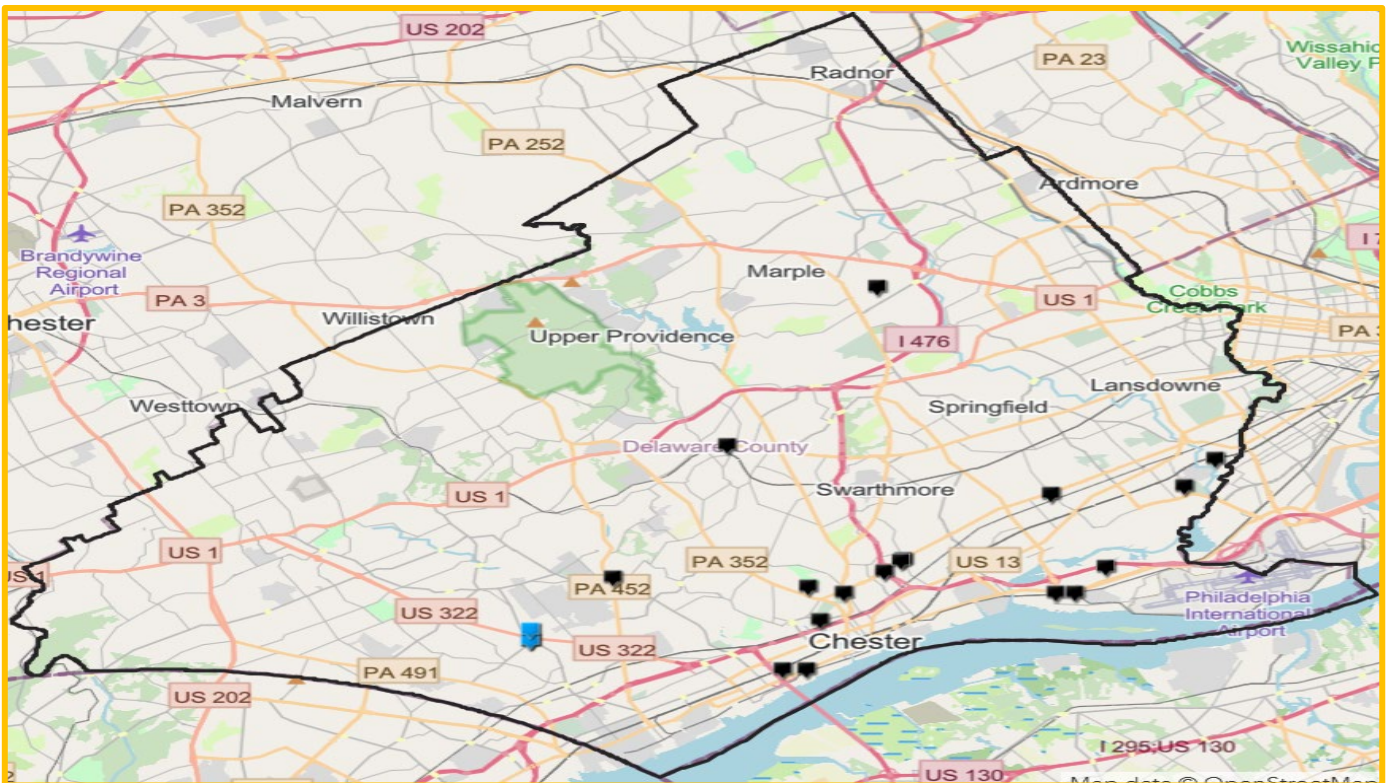
Race	Total Number & Sex	Percentage of Deaths
White	90; Male-53, Female- 37	74.38%
Black	29; Male-16, Female- 13	23.97%
Hispanic	2; Male- 1, Female- 1	1.65%



### DCOME Fatal Motor Vehicle Accidents, 2022-2024



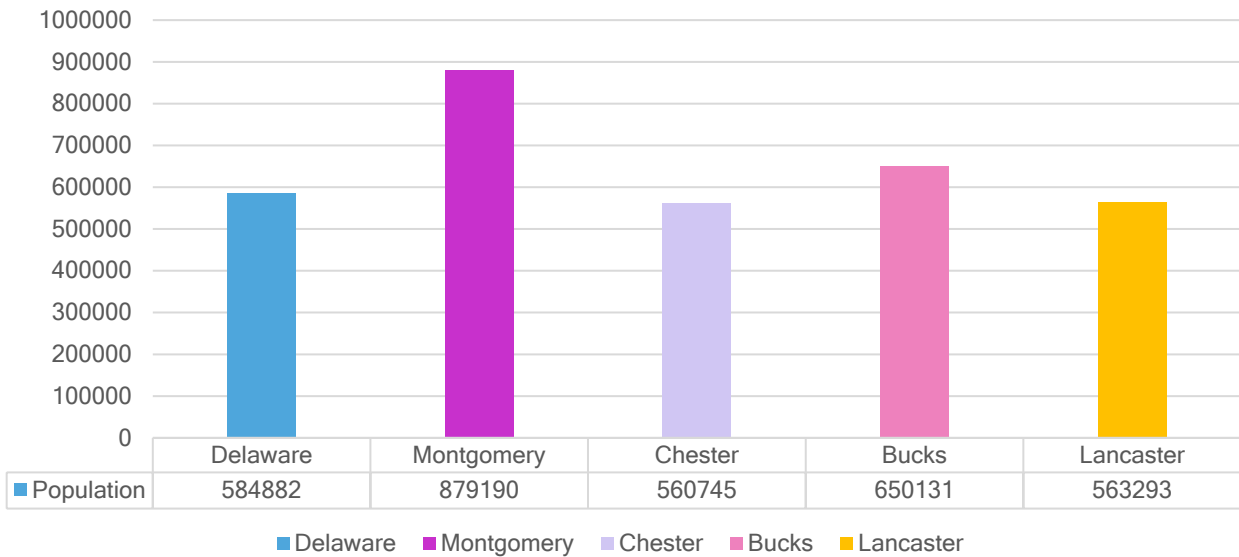
### Map of 2024 Fatal Motor Vehicle Accidents



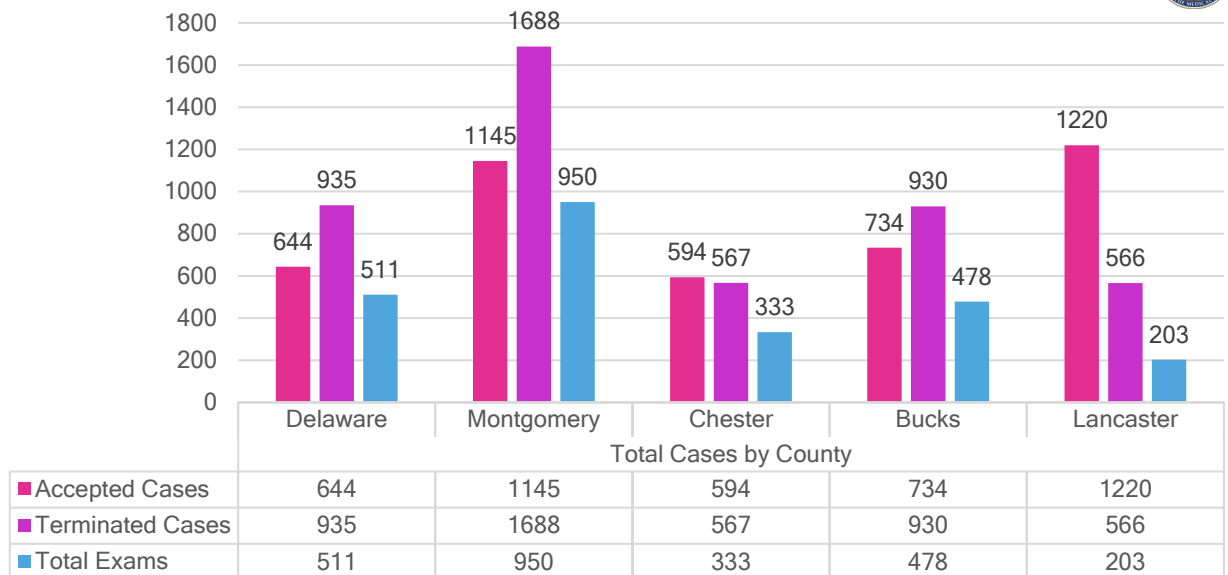
28 MVA were investigated by the DCOME however, 1 occurred in NJ. 6 of the remaining 27 incidents occurred on either I 476 or I 95 and could not be mapped.

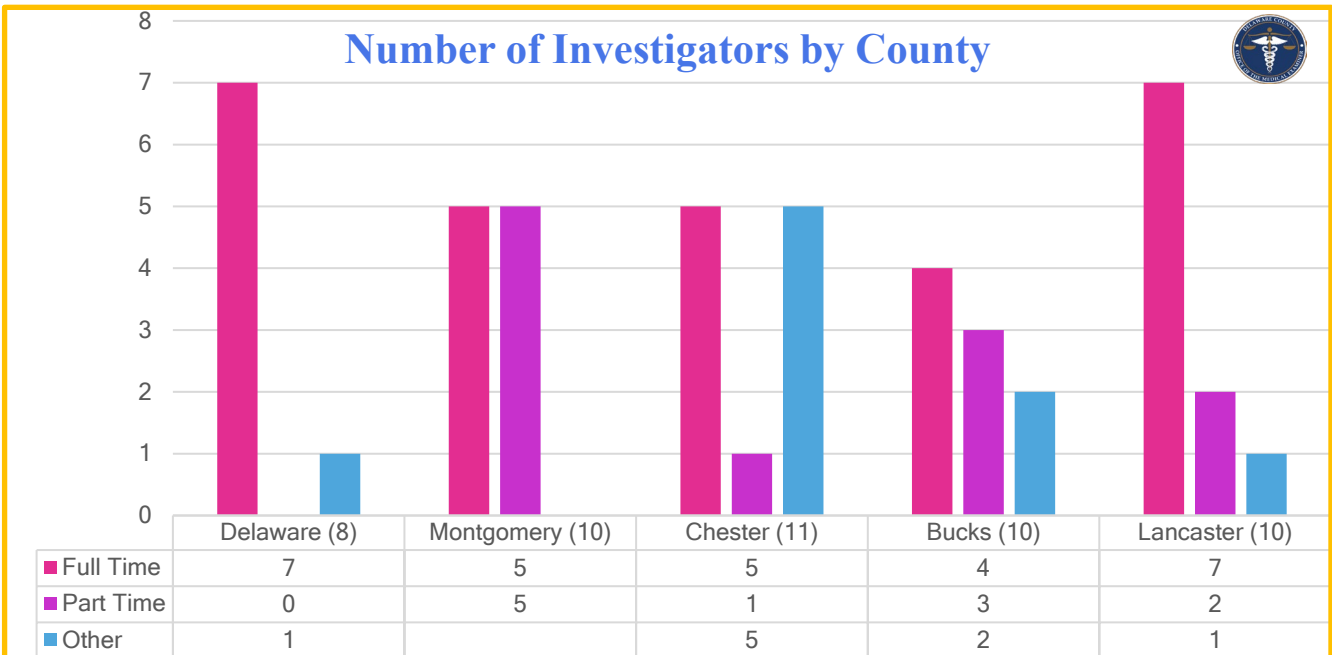
## 2024 Neighboring County Statistics

### Population by County 2024

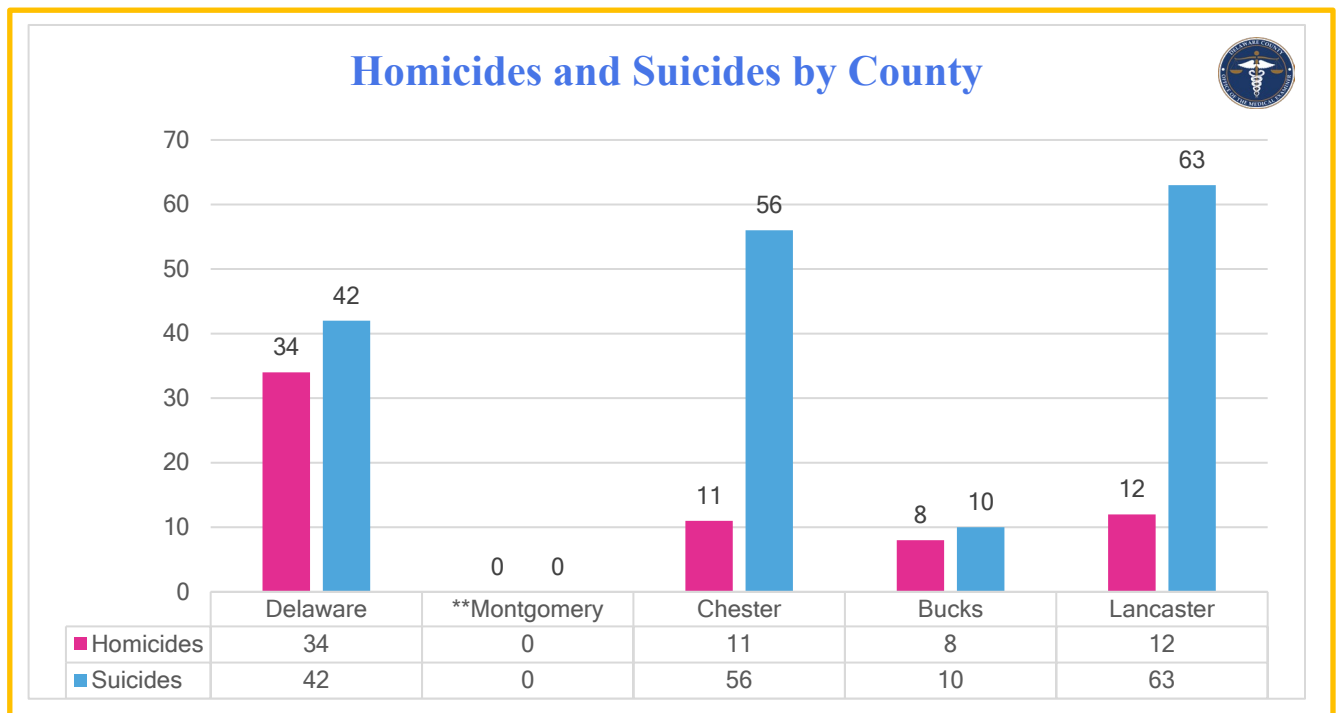


### Cases by County





\*Other- Is represented by a supervisor and or Manager (Chief) of Investigations



\*\*Montgomery County's stats were not available at the time of this publication

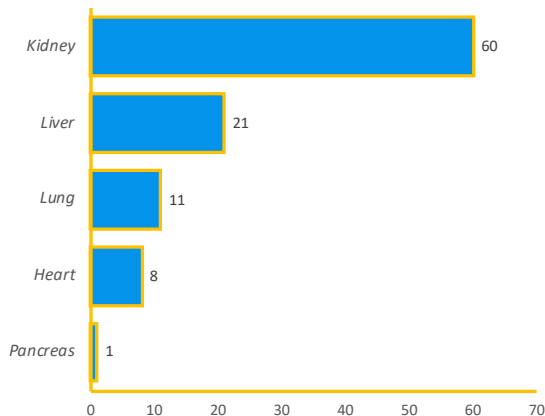
## 2024 Gift of Life Collaboration



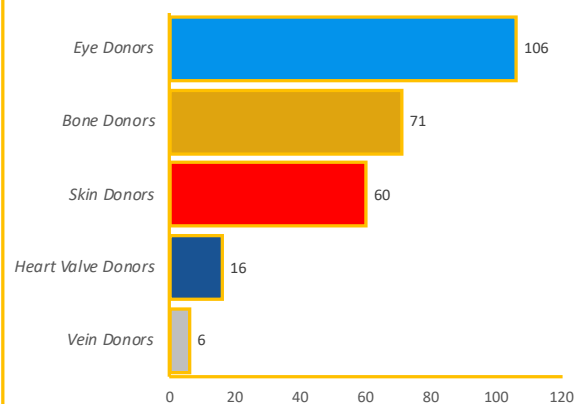
### Delaware County, PA Impact on Transplantation 2024



#### 38 Organ Donor 101 Organs Transplanted



#### 123 Tissue Donors



Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jeffrey E. Lange".

**Jeffrey E. Lange, MPA, SHRM-CP**  
**Administrator**

**Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner**

