



DISPOSITION OF UNCLAIMED BODIES

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ISSUE

Describe Connecticut's law regarding the disposition of unclaimed bodies.

LAW ON DISPOSITION OF UNCLAIMED BODIES

Responsibility for storing, transporting, and disposing unclaimed bodies is divided between towns and the state's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). State law requires OCME to investigate deaths that (1) involve certain conditions, such as violence or suspicious circumstances or (2) are sudden or unexpected and not caused by an easily recognizable disease ([CGS § 19a-406](#)). Once OCME completes procedures that require the deceased body, such as an autopsy, it must deliver the body to the person legally entitled to receive it. However, for an unclaimed body, the office must return it to the authorities in the town where the death occurred. The town is responsible for final disposition of the body and must pay the associated costs if the deceased person has not left property sufficient to cover the cost ([CGS § 19a-408](#)).

Additionally, the law requires towns to dispose of unclaimed bodies that are not OCME cases. The town must first notify the Department of Public Health and deliver the body to UConn, Quinnipiac University, Yale University, or the University of Bridgeport College of Chiropractic, if these institutions have requested the need for bodies for medical research use. Otherwise, the town may bury or cremate the body ([CGS § 19a-270](#)).

CURRENT PRACTICE

Although the law requires towns to dispose of these unclaimed bodies, in practice OCME had done so for many years. But in May 2016, OCME notified towns that it would stop providing this service as of July 1, 2016 due to storage facility limitations and budget cuts enacted by the legislature in [PA 16-2](#), May Special Session. On June 20th municipal advocates requested a legal opinion from the Attorney General (the request is still under review). Subsequent media articles



reported that OCME and municipalities reached a temporary compromise under which OCME agreed to continue to store and dispose of the unclaimed bodies, but that the towns would transport them. (Transportation costs approximately \$300 per body.)

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