

## 2023 SESSION

ENROLLED

### HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 790

*Commending the staff of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.*

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 21, 2023

Agreed to by the Senate, February 23, 2023

WHEREAS, the staff of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, an agency responsible for determining the cause and manner of deaths that occur under certain circumstances in the Commonwealth, operate a statewide medical examiner system with four district offices located in Norfolk, Richmond, Manassas, and Roanoke; and

WHEREAS, the staff of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigated 19,943 deaths in 2022, accepting 2,998 for autopsy and 6,695 for external examination and referring 10,250 back to local treating physicians to certify the cause of death; and

WHEREAS, the staff of the Tidewater District of the OCME were notified of a mass casualty event with mass fatalities at a Chesapeake Walmart on November 22, 2022, at 11:00 p.m.; and

WHEREAS, the staff of the Tidewater District of the OCME dispatched multiple medicolegal death investigators to the Walmart at 11:17 p.m., who worked with law-enforcement personnel on scene documentation and processing, as well as on the positive identification requirements for final disposition and release; and

WHEREAS, although November 23, 2022, was a scheduled half-day state holiday with several staff members of the Tidewater District of the OCME scheduled to either use approved leave or depart at the 12:00 p.m. closure time, forensic autopsy staff reported to the office at 5:00 a.m. to begin the initial processing of cases; they also received rapid and ongoing support from OCME staff throughout the statewide system, both in person and virtually; and

WHEREAS, all OCME staff worked to ensure that routine cases were accepted and processed as usual with no delays while evidence collection for the mass fatality incident proceeded, allowing for the proper collection and documentation of evidence and the preparation of reports for law enforcement and the local attorney for the Commonwealth; personal effects were then returned to the families' funeral industry partner representatives; and

WHEREAS, the two OCME forensic pathologists on duty worked closely with forensic autopsy team members to externally examine, document, and autopsy all seven decedents from the mass fatality incident by 5:00 p.m. on November 23, 2022, as other district and state staff disciplines provided administrative support and guidance; and

WHEREAS, OCME forensic autopsy staff reported to the office over the Thanksgiving holiday to ensure that affected family members were able to have their loved ones transferred to their chosen funeral industry partner without delay; non-mass fatality event cases were also processed during these times per standard procedures; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the staff of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for their dedication and service to the citizens of the Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to William T. Gormley, MD, chief medical examiner, as an expression of the General Assembly's appreciation for and recognition of the work of the staff of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

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