



Release of Information Policy

Policy# 12-0615-1 Release of Information Policy

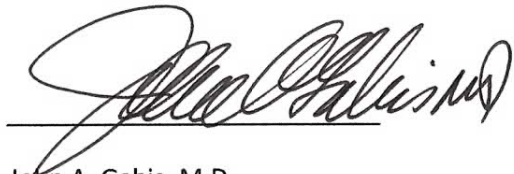
Purpose: To provide a standard for releasing of information to a Public Records request.
To fulfill a Public Records request without compromising a criminal or potential criminal death investigation.

Policy:

1. **No reports will be released** until the case has had final ruling on cause and manner of death.
2. This policy includes requests from the media, the general public, and the next of kin and/or all parties representing the next of kin.
3. This policy does not affect sharing of information with law enforcement doing a death investigation.
4. The only information that will be released during an active criminal investigation or potential criminal investigation will be the death certificate and facts and findings portion of the coroner's report.
5. Only after a criminal investigation case is considered closed by the prosecutor will reports generated by and/or for this office be released under the Public Records law.
6. At no time, unless by an appropriate court ordered subpoena, will case photos or investigator's work sheets be released to a Public Records request.
7. Photos will be made available to be viewed but not photocopied in any manner under an appropriate Public Records request, but only after the case is closed both as a death investigation and any criminal investigation.

8. Any request for release of information that this policy does not address or is questionable, **will** be submitted to coroner for direction.

This policy has been approved and is in effect until further notice:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Gabis", written over a horizontal line.

John A. Gabis, M.D.
Office of the Coroner, Ross County, Ohio

A handwritten date "6/15/2012" in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Date

Attach: ORC Public Records Disclos

313.10 Records to be public - certified copies as evidence.

(A)(1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, the records of the coroner who has jurisdiction over the case, including, but not limited to, the detailed descriptions of the observations written during the progress of an autopsy and the conclusions drawn from those observations filed in the office of the coroner under division (A) of section 313.13 of the Revised Code, made personally by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision, are public records. Those records, or transcripts or photostatic copies of them, certified by the coroner shall be received as evidence in any criminal or civil action or proceeding in a court in this state, as to the facts contained in those records. The coroner of the county where the death was pronounced shall be responsible for the release of all public records relating to that death.

(2) Except as otherwise provided in division (D) or (E) of this section, the following records in a coroner's office are not public records:

(a) Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;

(b) Photographs of a decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;

(c) Suicide notes;

(d) Medical and psychiatric records provided to the coroner, a deputy coroner, or a representative of the coroner or a deputy coroner under section 313.091 of the Revised Code;

(e) Records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section 149.43 of the Revised Code;

(f) Laboratory reports generated from the analysis of physical evidence by the coroner's laboratory that is discoverable under Criminal Rule 16.

(3) In the coroner's discretion, photographs of a decedent may be used for medical, legal, or educational purposes.

(B) All records in the coroner's office that are public records are open to inspection by the public, and any person may receive a copy of any such record or part of it upon demand in writing, accompanied by payment of a record retrieval and copying fee, at the rate of twenty-five cents per page or a minimum fee of one dollar.

(C)(1) The coroner shall provide a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a decedent to a person who makes a written request as the next of kin of the decedent. The following persons may make a request pursuant to this division as the next of kin of a decedent:

(a) The surviving spouse of the decedent;

(b) If there is no surviving spouse, or if the surviving spouse has died without having made a request pursuant to this division, any child of the decedent over eighteen years of age, with each child over eighteen years of age having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division;

(c) If there is no surviving spouse or child over eighteen years of age, or if the surviving spouse and all children over eighteen years of age have died without having made a request pursuant to this division, the parents of the decedent, with each parent having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division;

(d) If there is no surviving spouse, child over eighteen years of age, or parents of the decedent, or if all have died without having made a request pursuant to this division, the brothers and sisters of the decedent, whether of the whole or the half blood, with each having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division.

(2) If there is no surviving person who may make a written request as next of kin for a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner pursuant to division (C)(1) of this section, or if all next of kin of the decedent have died without having made a request pursuant to that division, the coroner shall provide a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a decedent to the representative of the estate of the decedent who is the subject of the records upon written request made by the representative.

(D) A journalist may submit to the coroner a written request to view preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings, suicide notes, or photographs of the decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's discretion or supervision. The request shall include the journalist's name and title and the name and address of the journalist's employer and state that the granting of the request would be in the best interest of the public. If a journalist submits a written request to the coroner to view the records described in this division, the coroner shall grant the journalist's request. The journalist shall not copy the preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings, suicide notes, or photographs of the decedent.

(E)(1) An insurer may submit to the coroner a written request to obtain a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a deceased person. The request shall include the name of the deceased person, the type of policy to which the written request relates, and the name and address of the insurer.

(2) If an insurer submits a written request to the coroner to obtain a copy of records pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section, the coroner shall grant that request.

(3) Upon the granting of a written request to obtain a copy of records by the coroner, the insurer may utilize the records for the following purposes:

(a) To investigate any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person;

(b) To determine coverage for any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person;

(c) To determine the insurer's liability for any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person.

(4) Prior to the delivery of records that are the subject of a request made pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section, the coroner may require the insurer who submitted the written request for the records to provide a payment to the coroner of a record retrieval and copying fee at the rate of twenty-five cents per page or a minimum fee of one dollar.

(5) Any records produced by the coroner in response to a written request under division (E)(1) of this section shall remain in the care, custody, and control of the insurer and its employees or representatives at all times. The insurer may not release or disclose the records to any other person unless any of the following apply:

(a) The release of the records is reasonably necessary to further a purpose described in division (E)(3) of this section.

(b) A court of competent jurisdiction orders the insurer to produce the records.

(c) The insurer is required to produce the records in response to a civil or criminal subpoena.

(d) The insurer is responding to a request for the records from a law enforcement agency, the department of insurance or a department of insurance from another state, or another governmental authority.

(F) The coroner may contact the decedent's next of kin to inform the next of kin that a journalist or an insurer has submitted a written request pursuant to division (D) or (E) of this section and whether the coroner has granted the journalist's or the insurer's request.

(G) As used in this section:

(1) "Full and complete records of the coroner" includes, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) The detailed descriptions of the observations written by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision during the progress of an autopsy and the conclusions drawn from those observations that are filed in the office of the coroner under division (A) of section 313.13 of the Revised Code;

(b) Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;

(c) Photographs of a decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;

(d) Suicide notes;

(e) Medical and psychiatric records provided to the coroner, a deputy coroner, or a representative of the coroner or a deputy coroner under section 313.091 of the Revised Code;

(f) Records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section 149.43 of the Revised Code;

(g) Laboratory reports generated from the analysis of physical evidence by the coroner's laboratory that is discoverable under Criminal Rule 16.

(2) "Insurer" has the same meaning as in section 3901.07 of the Revised Code.

(3) "Journalist" has the same meaning as in section 149.43 of the Revised Code.

Effective Date: 02-13-2001; 08-17-2006; 2008 HB471 04-07-2009