Policy: The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is responsible for releasing decedents held within the facility to a licensed funeral director following the written authorization pursuant to DC Code § 5-1411.

Purpose: To ensure efficient and timely release of decedents to authorized licensed funeral home representatives.

Scope: The following procedure is to assist the ID, Medical Examiner Transport Team (METT), Mortuary, and Investigations Units in the proper and efficient release of decedents stored at the OCME.

Definitions and Abbreviations:

CMS – electronic case management system

DCRA- District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

Funeral Home Representative- Funeral Director, Apprentice Funeral Director, Courtesy Funeral Director authorized to receive decedents.

ID Unit – Identification Unit

METT – Medical Examiner Transport Team

NOK – Next of Kin

OCME – Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Release staff – METT or Mortuary staff responsible for releasing a decedent

Standard:

- NAME, C1j Morgue Operations, Body Handling

1. ID Unit Decedent Release Procedure

1.1. Authorization of Decedent Release

1.1.1. The ID Unit staff receives via fax (or in person) a completed Authorization to Release a Body form from a funeral home.

1.1.1.1. Only the OCME standardized Authorization to Release a Body form is accepted from a funeral home.

1.1.1.2. Alternative forms requesting the release of a decedent are rejected.

1.1.1.3. When a completed Authorization to Release a Body form is received directly from a family member, the completed form is faxed to the designated funeral home as well as processed following the procedure below.

1.1.2. The ID Unit staff reviews the form to verify that all fields are complete and the form is legible. When the form is illegible or incomplete, the ID Unit staff contacts the funeral home and request a completed/legible form be submitted.

1.1.3. The ID Unit staff queries the funeral home via the District of Columbia Board of Funeral Directors website to verify the current status of the funeral home.

1.1.3.1. When the funeral home's status is active, the ID Unit staff writes "active" and initials and dates the Authorization to Release a Body form adjacent to the funeral home's name. The ID Unit places the form in the case chart and forwards the chart to Investigations.

1.1.3.2. When the funeral home's status is not listed on the website (out of District funeral homes), the ID Unit staff writes "Not Listed" next to the funeral home's name and initials and dates the entry. The ID Unit places the form in the case chart and forwards the chart to Investigations.

1.1.3.3. When the funeral home's status is inactive, the ID Unit staff writes "Inactive" next to the funeral home's name and initial and dates the entry. The ID Unit staff calls the funeral home to notify them that their status is "inactive" according to the District of Columbia Board of Funeral Directors website. The form is placed in the case chart.

1.2. Scheduling a Decedent Removal

1.2.1. Each day during the morning meeting, the METT staff reports to the ID Unit staff a start time for decedent release. (Start time is contingent upon the daily caseload.)

1.2.1.1. ID Unit staff schedules the release of one decedent per half hour.

1.2.2. When the ID Unit staff receives a call from a funeral home requesting to schedule a decedent removal, the staff:

1.2.2.1. verifies that the Authorization to Release a Body form is approved, signed and dated by an Investigator;

1.2.2.1.1. If the form is missing, the ID Unit staff requests the funeral home to fax the completed form.

1.2.2.1.2. If the form is unsigned, the ID Unit staff forwards the form to an Investigator.

1.2.2.1.3. If the form is Not Approved, the ID Unit notifies the funeral home or forwards the funeral home to an Investigator for more information.

1.2.2.1.4. If the decedent is on hold, the ID Unit staff forwards the caller to Investigations for additional information.

1.2.2.2. schedules the funeral home for a decedent removal and completes the OCME Release Log; and,

1.2.2.3. provides the OCME case number to the funeral home.

1.3. Completing Release Paperwork

1.3.1. The ID Unit staff enters into the Body Release page of CME the following information:

1.3.1.1. The name of the funeral home;

1.3.1.2. The name of the individual making the removal;

1.3.1.3. The title of the individual making the removal; and

1.3.1.4. The license number of the individual making the removal;

1.3.2. The ID Unit staff prints from the Release Checklist page in CME the Receipt of Certification of Death form and signs and dates the form.

1.3.3. The ID Unit staff prints two copies of the death certificate from EDRS.

1.3.3.1. One copy (two pages) is stapled and placed in the Transcription basket.

1.3.3.2. The first page of the second copy is placed in the chart.

1.3.3.3. The second page of the second copy, the Burial Transit Permit, is submitted with the signed Receipt of Certificate of Death and the approved and signed Authorization to Release a Body forms to the Release staff.

1.3.4. The ID Unit creates a decedent release folder that includes:

1.3.4.1. Signed and Approved Authorization to Release a Body form;

1.3.4.2. Burial Transit Permit; and,

1.3.4.3. Receipt of Certification of Death.

1.3.4.4. Death certificates approved for cremation may be included as well.

1.3.4.5. Communicable Disease Form may be included as well.

1.4. ID Unit Peer Review

1.4.1. The completed release folder is forwarded to another ID Unit staff member for review.

1.4.2. The peer reviewer verifies the case number, decedent's name (first and last), age, gender and race is the same on the Receipt of Certification of Death form, Authorization to Release a Body, and Burial Transit Permit.

1.4.2.1. The peer reviewer initials the Receipt of Certification of Death form following a successful review; or returns the folder to the staff member for corrections.

1.4.2.2. After successful review, the ID Unit staff places the decedent release folder in decedent release area.

1.5. Finalizing the Chart

1.5.1. At the end of the day, the ID Unit Staff retrieves the completed release paperwork from the Documentation room and places it in the appropriate case chart.

1.5.2. The chart is placed in the Records Management basket.

2. Investigations Decedent Release Procedure

2.1. Release folders are picked up from the ID Unit throughout the day.

2.2. An investigator shall cross check the OCME standard Authorization to Release a Body form with the case information in the case chart to confirm that the form is in the correct chart. The investigator writes the case number in the designated area at the top of the form.

2.3. The investigator compares the information on the Authorization to Release a Body form against the information in CME, the death certificate, and the decedent survivor form (when available). Investigator confirms that the following information is correct on the Authorization to Release a Body form

2.3.1. Decedent's name (first and last)

2.3.2. Date of Death

2.3.3. Date of Birth

2.3.4. Age

2.3.5. Race

2.3.6. Gender

2.4. The investigator verifies that the ID Unit staff has documented the funeral home's status as "active" or "not listed" and initialed and dated the entry.

2.5. The investigator verifies that the individual who signed the form is the legal NOK and checks the Approved or Not Approved box on the form, appropriately. The legal next of kin must be clearly documented in the decedent survivor module of CME prior to approving a release.

2.5.1. Thirty days (30) after the date the body was received by OCME, an individual other than the legal NOK may claim a decedent.

2.6. When the decedent's name (first and last), decedent's demographics or NOK signature is incorrect the Authorization to Release a Body form is rejected.

2.6.1. Discrepancies in middle name/middle initial, presence/absence of suffixes, or variations in racial description (e.g. White vs. Caucasian) are not an immediate reason to reject an Authorization to Release a Body form. When a discrepancy is identified and deemed insignificant, the investigator circles the discrepancy, writes a comment (e.g., "approved with middle initial") and initials and dates the comment.

2.6.2. When the Authorization to Release a Body is Not Approved, the investigator notes the reason for the rejection on the form and notifies the funeral home of the incorrect information and requests a corrected Authorization to Release a Body form be faxed to OCME.

2.7. Once the document is reviewed, the investigator returns the case chart with the Authorization to Release Form to the ID Unit and places it in the case file drawer.

3. Decedent Release Procedure

3.1. General

3.1.1. Decedents to be released from OCME shall be secured and accompanied by OCME staff at all times during the removal process.

3.1.2. A minimum of two OCME staff are required to be present and participate in the release process.

3.1.3. Only staff from METT or Mortuary units are permitted to conduct decedent releases. Investigative and Pathology staff are permitted to serve as a witness in the release process.

3.1.4. Decedents leaving the OCME can <u>only</u> be released to a licensed Funeral Home Representative.

3.1.5. Release staff must confirm in CMS that the body is <u>ready to be released</u> and that the 'Body Release' module has been properly completed by the ID Unit to include Funeral Home, Funeral Home representative, Funeral Home representative title, and Funeral Home representative license number.

3.1.6. Before a decedent can be released from OCME:

3.1.6.1. Funeral Home Representative shall verbally confirm the OCME case number, and decedent's name, age, race and gender as listed on the approved Authorization to Release a Body form to the OCME staff; and,

3.1.6.2. Release staff receives a copy of the Authorization to Release a Body form from the Funeral Home Representative either in hard copy or electronic format.

3.1.7. The following documents are presented by the individual making the removal and are photocopied by the Release staff.

3.1.7.1. Funeral Director's License presented by a Funeral Directors; or,

3.1.7.2. Funeral Director's License AND Apprentice Funeral Director's License presented by an Apprentice Funeral Directors; or,

3.1.7.3. Courtesy Card License presented by a Funeral Director designee.

3.1.7.4. Licensed Funeral Home Representatives shall present valid (not expired) licenses to Release staff to receive decedents.

3.1.7.4.1. If an individual referenced in sections 3.1.7.1-3.1.7.4 presents with an expired license, alternate documentation may be accepted by Release staff.

The alternate documentation shall include the following:

- Funeral Home Representatives Name;
- Funeral Home Representatives License Unique Number;
- License Cycle Start Date for Present Calendar Year;
- License Expiration Date for Present Calendar Year; and
- Photograph of Funeral Home Representative on Government Issued Identification

3.1.7.4.1.1. The alternate documentation referenced in section 3.1.7.4.1. shall be photocopied and placed in the release folder by Release staff.

3.1.7.4.1.2. All deviations from documentation presented by individuals referenced in sections 3.1.7.1-3.1.7.4 shall be approved by the Chief Medical Examiner, or designee, prior to acceptance by the Release staff.

3.1.8. The Release Staff shall verify that the license presented by an individual referenced in sections 3.1.7.1-3.1.7.4 is active by cross referencing the credentials on funeral home representative license or on alternate documentation with the credentials on the DCRA website (https://funeral.dcopla.com).

3.1.8.1 If the status of the license presented by an individual referenced in sections 3.1.7.1-3.1.7.4 is inactive on the DCRA website, the Release Staff shall notify the METT Supervisor or Lead on duty, Mortuary Unit Supervisor, or Mortuary Unit Leads prior to proceeding with the release process.

3.1.9. The Release staff cross checks the Authorization to Release a Body form received from the Funeral Home Representative to the approved Authorization to Release a Body form, Receipt of Death Certificate, Burial Transit, Death Certificate (when applicable), and Communicable Disease Form (when applicable) received from the ID Unit.

3.1.9.1. If a discrepancy is identified in the decedent's name (first, middle, last, or suffix), age, race, gender, date of birth, or date of death, the Release staff shall verify that the investigator has included a comment, date, and initials on the forms to acknowledge release approval with the difference [See 2.5.1] prior to proceeding with the release process.

3.1.9.2. If discrepancies are noted, the Release staff shall notify METT Supervisor or Lead on duty, Mortuary Unit Supervisor, Mortuary Unit Leads, Forensic Anthropologist, or Director of Investigations prior to proceeding with the release process.

3.1.9.3. When no discrepancies are identified or discrepancies in the name, age, race, gender, date of birth, or date of death are appropriately annotated, Funeral Home Representative and Release staff initial at the bottom of the approved Authorization to Release a Body form received from the ID Unit on the appropriate line.

3.1.10. Release staff retrieves the body from the cooler and places it in the designated release area.

3.1.10.1. The OCME case number and name of decedent removed from the cooler are removed from the Human Remains Inventory Box and Cart Sheet.

3.2. Releasing a Decedent

3.2.1. The Release staff opens the body bag to expose the decedent and clothing and/or personal property within the body bag for inspection by the Funeral Home Representative.

3.2.1.1. Each item of clothing and personal property is reviewed by Release staff and shown to the Funeral Home Representative.

3.2.2. Release staff removes the decedent's toe tag and photocopies it.

3.2.2.1. Release staff verifies decedent's name (first, middle, last, and suffix), age, gender, race, and OCME case number before removing the toe tag.

3.2.2.2. The Release staff and Funeral Home Representative shall initial the verified toe tag prior to photocopy.

3.2.2.2.1. Photocopies of the decedents initialed toe tag must have legible OCME Case Number and Decedents name, age, race, and sex.

3.2.2.3. If the name, age, race, or gender on the decedent's toe tag is incorrect or changed the Release staff shall complete the following:

3.2.2.3.1. Print a new CMS label; and

3.2.2.3.2. Create a new toe tag and Identification band; and

3.2.2.3.3. Initial and Copy the new and original toe tags; and

3.2.2.3.4. Replace the incorrect toe tag and Identification band with the corrected toe tag and Identification band.

3.2.3. The following forms are processed during the decedent release. Release staff verifies that the case number, decedent's name, age, gender, and race are consistent on all forms before signing. The forms are signed and dated by the Funeral Home Representative as well as the Release staff, unless otherwise noted below.

3.2.3.1. Receipt of Remains (generated from CMS at the time of release);

3.2.3.2. Property Released to Funeral Home (generated from CME at the time of release);

3.2.3.2.1. The Property Released to the Funeral Home Form is cross checked by the Release staff with the items of clothing and personal property in the body bag.

3.2.3.3. Receipt of Certification of Death (signed by ID Unit and Funeral Home Representative, not Release staff).

3.2.3.4. Toe tag [See 3.2.2]

3.2.3.5. Release logbook signed by Release staff and the Funeral Home Representative.

3.2.4. The following forms are provided to the Funeral Home Representative:

3.2.4.1. Burial Transit Permit;

3.2.4.2. Certificate of Death, when requested for a direct cremation;

3.2.4.3. Communicable Disease form, when applicable;

3.2.4.4. A copy of the Receipt of Remains and Property Released to Funeral Home Form, as requested by licensed Funeral Home Representative.

3.2.5. Release staff assists the funeral home personnel with transferring the decedent to the removal equipment, as needed.

3.3. Release Staff Peer Review

3.3.1. The following completed forms and documentation are peer reviewed by another Release staff prior to releasing decedent to licensed Funeral Home Representatives.

3.3.1.1. Approved Authorization to Release a Body Form
3.3.1.2. Receipt of Certificate of Death Form
3.3.1.3. Burial Transit Form and/or Death Certificate
3.3.1.4. Communicable Disease Form
3.3.1.5. Receipt of Remains Form
3.3.1.6. Property Released to Funeral Home Form
3.3.1.7. Photocopy of Decedents Toe Tag
3.3.1.8. Release Log Book
3.3.1.9. CMS Body Release Module
3.3.1.10. CMS Property Release Module

3.3.2. The peer reviewer verifies and cross checks the OCME case number, decedent’s name (first, middle, last, and suffix), age, race, and gender on all release forms documents and Release log book.

3.3.2.1. If a discrepancy has been identified in the decedent’s name (first, middle, last, or suffix), the Release staff shall verify that the investigator has included a comment, date, and initials on the forms to acknowledge release approval with the difference [See 2.6.1] prior to proceeding with the release process.

3.3.2.2. Any discrepancies in age, race, gender, date of death, and date of birth must be rectified before releasing the decedent [See 3.1.8.2].

3.3.3. The peer reviewer verifies and cross checks that the forms and Release log book are completed with date/time, and signatures of the Release staff, and Funeral Home Representative.

3.3.4. The peer reviewer verifies and cross checks that all personal property and clothing items in body bag are documented on the Property Released to Funeral Home form and in CMS Chain of Custody Release Module.

3.3.5. The peer reviewer completes and signs the Release checklist following a successful review; or notifies Release staff for correction.

3.4. Post-Release Procedure

3.4.1. The following forms are placed in the ID Unit basket for retrieval by the ID Unit staff:

3.4.1.1. Receipt of Certificate of Death;

3.4.1.2. Copy of the funeral home representatives license;

3.4.1.3. Approved Authorization to Release a Body Form.

3.4.2. The following forms are retained by the Release staff for quality assurance review prior to submission to Records Management:

3.4.2.1. Receipt of Remains;

3.4.2.2. Property Released to Funeral Home;

3.4.2.3. Photocopy of the toe tags; and,

3.4.2.4. Release Checklist [See 3.3.5].

3.4.3. Body trays and carts are disinfected.

4. Release of Tissue and Specimens

4.1. Supplemental requests to release tissue and specimens shall be received from licensed funeral home representatives and evaluated for authorization and approval by Chief Medical Examiner, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner, or designee.

4.2. Following authorization, tissue and specimens shall be released to licensed funeral home representatives following the same release procedures as referenced above [See 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4].

4.3. The Supplemental Receipt of Remains form shall be completed by the Release Staff and funeral home representatives for release of tissue and specimens.

4.3.1. The Supplemental Receipt of Remains form is generated from Qualtrax and signed and dated by the Release staff and Funeral Home Representative

4.3.2. The ‘Supplemental Receipt of Remains’ form is accessible from the Documents menu in Qualtrax.

4.3.3. The following forms are retained by the Release staff for quality assurance review prior to submission to Records Management:

4.3.3.1. Supplemental Receipt of Remains;

4.3.3.2. Photocopy of the toe tags; and,

4.3.3.3. Release Checklist [See 3.3.5].

5. Public Disposition

5.1. Decedents shall be released to a licensed funeral home representative for the purpose of public disposition following authorization by the Forensic Anthropologist and Investigator.

- 5.1.1. Decedents are eligible for release for public disposition after a period of 30 days following reception at OCME.

5.2. The verification and labeling of decedents released for public disposition shall be completed prior to the scheduled release date as follows:

- 5.2.1. Decedents released for public disposition and anatomical donation will be marked in refrigerated storage with colored toe tags.
- 5.2.2. The colored toe tags and original toe tag will be initially verified by forensic anthropologist and mortuary unit supervisor or designee for verification of the decedent identification before the scheduled release date.
- 5.2.3. The presence of the clothing, personal property in the body bag and in photographs will be initially verified by mortuary unit supervisor or designee before the scheduled release date.
- 5.2.4. At the time of the release the mortuary staff will mark the Public Disposition box in the Body Release module in CME.

5.3. Decedents shall be released for public disposition to the licensed funeral home representative following the same release procedures as referenced above [See 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4].