

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA)
State Implementation Plan

FY 2023 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program

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Objectives:

1. Report quarterly DCRA data to the Department of Justice.
2. Promote agencies' awareness of DCRA reporting requirements.
3. Assist agencies with DCRA reporting requirements.

1. DCRA Data Collection Infrastructure

The state of Georgia requires that all deaths that happen in the state are reported by the funeral director who first assumes custody of the body, unless a death report was previously made by the hospital or other institution in which death occurred within three (3) calendar days after death. Exceptions are made for deaths that occur without medical attendance or in cases subject to inquiry under Title 45, Chapter 16, Article 2, however certification shall be made within 30 days after notification of death. On or before the tenth day of each month, the state registrar shall furnish to the Secretary of State's office a list of those persons for whom death certificates have been filed during the previous month.

For deaths in custody (Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 125-2-4-.20) **under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Corrections**, the following procedures are outlined and should be followed:

1. For deaths by natural causes or causes certifiable by the institutional physician, the Warden/Superintendent will notify next of kin and Commissioner of Corrections promptly, who will both be provided Certificates of Death.
2. For sudden or violent deaths, the Warden/Superintendent shall notify:
 - a. Commissioner of Corrections;
 - b. Coroner/Medical Examiner of the county in which the death occurs (autopsy is requested in all such cases);
 - c. Director of State Crime Laboratory (notified of all inmate deaths under State Board of Corrections jurisdiction);
 - d. Director of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation;
 - e. Internal Investigation Section;
 - f. Next of kin.
3. Findings are recorded by the Peace Officer, Medical examiner, or Coroner if foul play is suspected.
4. In the event of a suicide, accidental death or death under suspicious circumstances, the following procedures shall be observed:
 - a. The medical records of the inmate shall be copied and sent to the Health Services Unit at Department of Corrections' central office for review.
 - b. A written report providing the details of the death, the Coroner's or Medical Examiner's report and the other available documentation shall be submitted to the Commissioner of Corrections.

As such, Georgia law only requires and outlines procedures for reporting deaths-in-custody so long as those deaths occur in institutions under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Corrections. Other correctional and detention facilities that do not fall under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Corrections are not required by state law to report those deaths.

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), via its Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), assists agencies with reporting DCRA. The Research Analyst assigned to DCRA is responsible for setting up meetings with the agencies to discuss the data collection process and reporting requirements.

Additionally, these meetings also help the SAC Analyst better understand how agencies collect their data so that the Statistical Analysis Center can assist them to increase the quality of reporting.

The State of Georgia currently has 623 non-federal law enforcement agencies, 35 State prisons, 11 transitional centers, 8 probation detention centers, 21 County prisons, 146 County jails, 4 contract prisons, and 25 juvenile facilities. Currently, there is no state law requiring the nearly 800 different agencies to report death in custody information to CJCC. However, there are rules and regulations to report inmates' deaths to other agencies. Therefore, the SAC has developed a methodology to collect death in custody data from the five Medical Examiner Offices (MEOs) in Georgia, the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) death reporting system, Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC), and Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

Since starting the DCRA data collection in 2019, all eight target reporting agencies have provided data to the SAC. Turnover has caused delays in reporting for almost all agencies, and currently the Gwinnett County Medical Examiner's Office is not reporting. For agencies that have stopped reporting regularly, CJCC establishes lines of communication to encourage the submission of reports. Below is the communication strategy that highlights how CJCC will continue to achieve that goal.

Goal	Audience	Period	Format and methodology	Responsibility	Back up
Encourage non-reporting entities to start reporting every quarter	Non reporting Agencies	Quarterly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send email reminder three weeks before reporting deadline. Follow-up with late reporters. Work with agencies to establish a new point of contact. Meet with the new contact/s to assist them with DCRA requirements and reporting. 	Statistical Analysis Center/ Research Analyst	Statistical Analysis Center Director

2. Data Collection Methods

Data collection from the Metropolitan Medical Examiner's Offices (MEOs)

A research analyst in the Statistical Analysis Center is assigned to communicate and collect DCRA data from agencies. The SAC contacts all metropolitan county Medical Examiner's Offices (MEO), the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, which oversees all decedent investigations for areas not covered by the five metro county MEOs, the Georgia Department of Corrections and Department for Juvenile Justice to obtain data about deaths in custody. Each quarter, the above agencies report all decedent deaths for the appropriate reporting period and upload these documents to CJCC secured SharePoint site.

The CJCC currently receives data from the following agencies:

- Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC; Monthly)
- Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI; Quarterly)
- Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ; Quarterly)
- Gwinnett County Medical Examiner's Office (Quarterly)¹
- DeKalb County Medical Examiner's Office (Quarterly)

¹ Has not reported for previous two quarters, staff is working to gain reliable contact for reporting.

- f. Fulton County Medical Examiner's Office (Quarterly)
- g. Cobb County Medical Examiner's Office (Quarterly)

Data Collection from the Department of Public Health (DPH)

The CJCC has obtained a data-sharing agreement with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to receive death certificate information monthly. CJCC used the death certificate to cross-check and validate incomplete death record data received from the MEOs and to capture all reportable deaths in custody.

The CJCC receives two files from DPH the first week of every month:

- a. All year-to-date deaths in one file
- b. All law enforcement (LE) related year-to-date deaths.

Data Collection Tools

Agencies submit their DCRA data through a secured SharePoint site in an Excel spreadsheet or CSV file considering the BJA data collection requirements.

Data Collection Challenges

- Quality of submitted data.
 - Missing information or variables for decedents
 - Submission of duplicate decedents in a reporting period
- Merging files: Each agency submits its DRCA data in different Excel spreadsheet formats and variable names.
- No unique identifiers for decedents
- Non-reporting decedents
- Reporting decedents after the reporting period.
- Finding difference in information between agencies data and death certificates data.

To overcome these challenges, CJCC establishes communication with the agencies individually to understand their data collection process and discuss the DCRA data requirements. Additionally, CJCC presents and shares BJA's Excel spreadsheet template with the agencies for awareness of reporting variables requirements and formatting.

Furthermore, before every reporting quarter, the research analyst assigned to DCRA in the SAC reaches out to the agencies to assist in the data collection and provide an Excel Spreadsheet containing the DCRA variable requirements and explanation.

3. Data Reporting Methods

Data cleaning and reviewing process.

The CJCC uses BJA's Excel spreadsheet template as a guideline to collect and compile all DCRA data submitted by the agencies from a secured SharePoint. Additionally, a data analyst cleans, reviews, and verifies decedent information via death certificate data and identifies any pertinent decedent records that

may have been absent from the external agency files. After reviewing the data analyst uploads the BJA Excel spreadsheet template to the PMT website.

Data amending process:

The CJCC follows BJA guidelines for record modification and reporting changes for each quarter and makes all changes after completing and submitting the initial report. If the SAC or BJA finds errors, incompleteness, or missing data on CJCC's submission, the SAC uses several records to update the information in the PMT. Below are the steps:

- Review the original data submissions to identify the decedent and ensure no duplicate data exists.
- Check the original data to verify the missing information and contact the agency that submitted the record.
- Cross-check the data with the death certificate record before amending and import it to the BJA/PMT website.

Additionally, for tracking and updating the status of open or pending investigation records CJCC, through its Statistical Analysis Center, follows this process:

- Create an Excel spreadsheet file that contains records with a pending investigation for each reporting quarter.
- Verify any duplicate record during a reporting quarter with that file.
- Contact agencies each reporting quarter for updates.
- Verify any updates with the death certificate records.
- Contact BJA service helpdesk and request access to update the pending records to the PMT.