



**OKLAHOMA**

Office of the  
Chief Medical Examiner



# Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

**FY 2027 Budget Hearing Presentation**

Submitted by: Dr. Eric A. Pfeifer, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner

# Dr. Eric A. Pfeifer, M.D.

Chief Medical Examiner



The **Office of the Chief Medical Examiner** is statutorily charged with investigating sudden, violent, unexpected and suspicious deaths. These medicolegal investigations collect evidence, determine cause and manner of death, and provide expert testimony in both criminal and civil legal proceedings. When a death occurs on the job or appears to be work-related, the results of the medicolegal investigation are of direct benefit to the family in order that insurance claims may be appropriately settled. These examinations also help identify potentially unsafe consumer products. The public health function of the medical examiner's office is further apparent in the investigation of cases in which poisons, hazardous work environments or infectious agents are implicated. The identification of such dangerous elements allows the prompt implementation of treatment and preventative measures through coordination with Oklahoma's public health agencies and OSHA.

Founded in **1965**, this agency now encompasses the following divisions: Administration, Forensic Anthropology, Investigations, Forensic Pathology Services and Toxicology.

# Agency Vision, Mission and Core Values

**Vision:** Dignified and thorough medicolegal investigations of applicable deaths occurring in the State of Oklahoma.

**Mission:** The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is to protect the public health and safety of Oklahomans through the scientific investigation of deaths as defined by state statutes. This process involves scene investigation and medicolegal autopsy (including radiology, toxicology, histology, and microbiology) complementing the activities of law enforcement agencies, district attorneys and public health officials. We accept the responsibility with integrity, diligence and compassion in order to best assist and provide answers to families, law enforcement and taxpayers of this state.

**Core Values:** Integrity, dignified independent investigation and handling of human remains, professionalism.



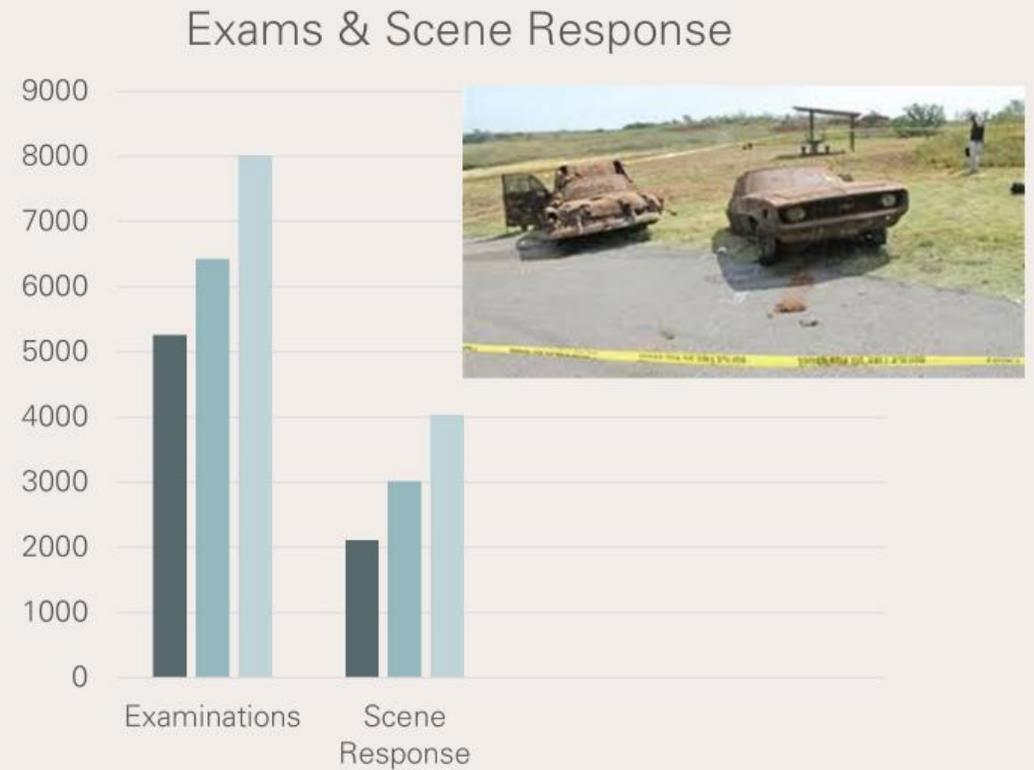
# Accomplishments

Top accomplishments for FY 2025 – FY 2026

- National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) Accreditation as required by Oklahoma Statute Title 74-150.37
- Advancement in identification process for 1960's & 1970's anthropology cases
- Toxicology turnaround time with 99% of cases completed within 90 days
- Adequate staffing with 18 forensic pathologist (compared to only 5 about a decade ago). Increase to almost double the amount of scenes responded to. Full coverage of rural areas by district investigators.
- ACGME Fellowship success with Oklahoma trained pathologists working in Hawaii, Chicago, & OU Medical Center.



# Change in Workload; 2010 - 2024



# Analysis of Agency Challenges

	<b>Challenge Description</b>	<b>Current Actions</b> (Briefly describe how the agency is currently addressing the challenge.)	<b>Planned Actions</b> (Briefly describe how the agency plans to address the challenge going forward.)
1	<p>The FY26 budget decrease, together with escalating supply, labor, and technology costs, jeopardizes the agency's ability to sustain core services. Approval of the FY27 appropriation request is essential to continue operations at required service levels.</p>	<p>To meet growing caseload demands, we've drawn down all available cash reserves. Additional funding is now essential to cover operational costs and maintain our level of service.</p>	<p>Request additional appropriations to retain core services and handle increased case load.</p>
2	<p>Maintain NAME accreditation with 2% cut in appropriations. NAME accreditation is legally mandated per Oklahoma Statute Title 74-150.37</p>	<p>Utilizing agency's available cash balance to continue to provide core services and maintain accreditation as required by Oklahoma Statute Title 74-150.37.</p>	<p>With available cash balance depleted, agency will request additional appropriations to maintain legally mandated accreditation.</p>
3	<p>Maintain use of critical aging large equipment in Autopsy &amp; Toxicology laboratories.</p>	<p>Utilizing maintenance contracts and tracking preventative maintenance. Researching work arounds for failing and/or outdated equipment.</p>	<p>As equipment begins to fail, agency will seek grants and/or request additional appropriations to replace failing equipment.</p>
4	<p>Toxicology Laboratory needs additional space to handle caseload and house equipment needed for increased demands.</p>	<p>Chemists and Toxicologists sharing laboratory space to keep up with testing demands thus decreasing ability to maintain turnaround standards.</p>	<p>As increased testing/equipment is necessary to handle caseload while meeting turnaround expectations, agency will need to secure funding to increase the capacity of the Toxicology Laboratory.</p>
			

# Savings & Efficiencies (Current or Planned)

Savings or Efficiency Name	Brief description of how savings were achieved	Savings in Unit of Measurement*	FY 2025 (Actual \$ Savings)	FY 2026 (Projected \$ Savings)	FY 2027 (Projected \$ Savings)
<i>Toxicology</i>	<i>Secure grant funding to purchase replacement equipment and supplies.</i>	<i>Reimbursement</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>\$485,000</i>	<i>0</i>
<b>CT vs Surgical Autopsy</b>	With the ability to examine decedents radiographically with current technology, many cases don't need to be physically cut for autopsy. Saving both time and increasing case completion.	Increased case completion times and accuracy			
<b>2 Fellows (OKC &amp; Tulsa)</b>	Salary of fellow about half what board certified pathologists are paid while providing autopsy services supervised by an attending.	Increased case completion times			
<b>In-house neuropathologist (OKC &amp; Tulsa)</b>	Brains do not need to be sent off because neuro consults are completed in-house improving case completion time and providing additional information to law enforcement without consulting an outside source.	Increased case completion times and accuracy			

\* Hours, FTE, square feet, etc.



# Agency Goals and Key Performance Metrics

Goal	Metric	FY 25 Target	FY 25 Actuals	FY 26 Target
1 Maintain State Statute Accountability	Annual Review	Agency prepared for survey		Accreditation granted to both OKC & Tulsa locations
2 Decrease Autopsy turnaround time	90% case completion within 90 days	90%	98%	100%
3 District coverage in rural areas	Scene response (average – does not include metro areas) Previous year's response times averaged up to 90 minutes.	60 minutes	68 minutes	60 minutes
4 Retention of staff	Retain professional staff to maintain level of service and handle increased caseload.	100%	100%	100%
5				
6				
7				
8				



# Projects for FY 2026

- 1) Case Management System update – Current Database is 25 years old and cannot support additional tasks
- 2) Validation of postmortem exams with CT imaging and beside drug testing
- 3) Pathologist collaboration with external review boards and entities (OU Trauma team, Child Death Review Board, Maternal Death Review Board, Domestic Violence Review Board)



# Projects for FY 2027

- 1) Expansion into 3rd floor of current building in OKC for additional space in toxicology department
- 2) Same as for FY 2026



# Total Historic Actual Expenditures (FY 2021-25) and Current Year Budget (FY 2026)

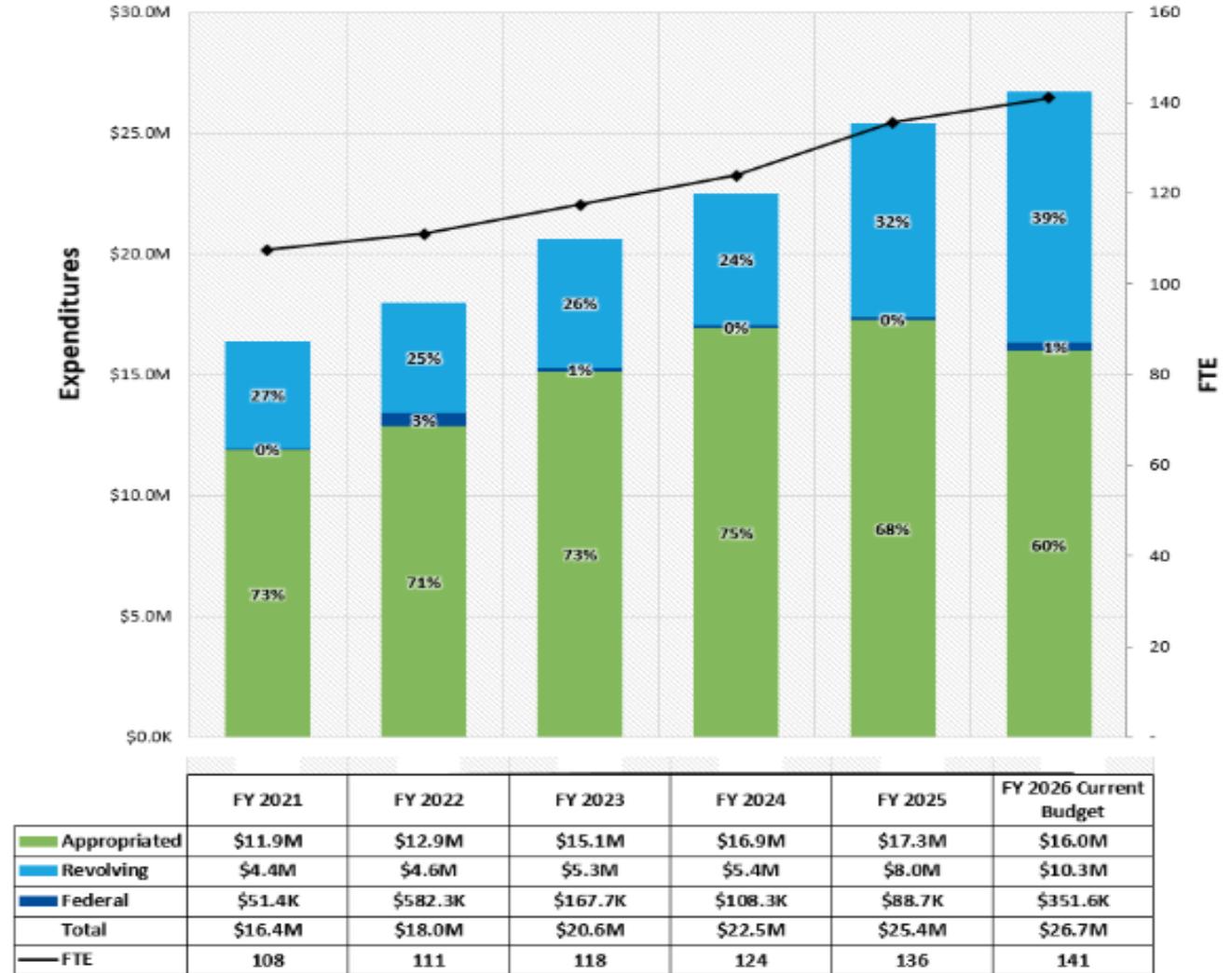
## Explanation of Changes and Trends

FY 2021 continued to purchase equipment and supplies for Tulsa office. IT begins planning moving project for Tulsa office. FY 2022 completed construction of Tulsa site on OSU-Tulsa campus and began vacating old building/moving into new building. Continued IT projects to complete Tulsa office. FY 2023 complete move into Tulsa building. Purchase additional equipment and supplies as needed for daily operation. FY 2024 completion of ABFT & ISO accreditation for Toxicology Laboratory, retention of ACGME accreditation for Fellowship program. Continued recruitment and retention of professional staff as appropriate for caseload. FY 2025 National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) re-accreditation. Retention of professional staff to meet/exceed national standards.

FY 2026 National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation granted to both Oklahoma City & Tulsa offices.

**\*\*Please note 141 FTE includes 5 part time and 1 part time that has retired her position was eliminated and is no longer budgeted as of 12/2/2025. At the time of budget we had 2 double filled full time due to retirement.**

### Historic Actual Expenditures and Current Year Budget



# Estimated Impact of Federal Funding Changes

<i>Program Name</i>	<i>Federal Agency</i>	<i>Description of expected change (s) (i.e. change in state match, admin costs, program requirements or client eligibility, etc.)</i>	<i>Actual FY 25 Total Federal Funding Received (\$)</i>	<i>Projected FY 26 Total Federal Funding To Be Received (\$)</i>	<i>Estimated FY 27 Total Federal Funding To Be Received (\$)</i>
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$
			\$	\$	\$

*\* Only list programs with federal funding that are expected to change. Refer to the agency's Federal Funds Schedule in the Budget Request document.*



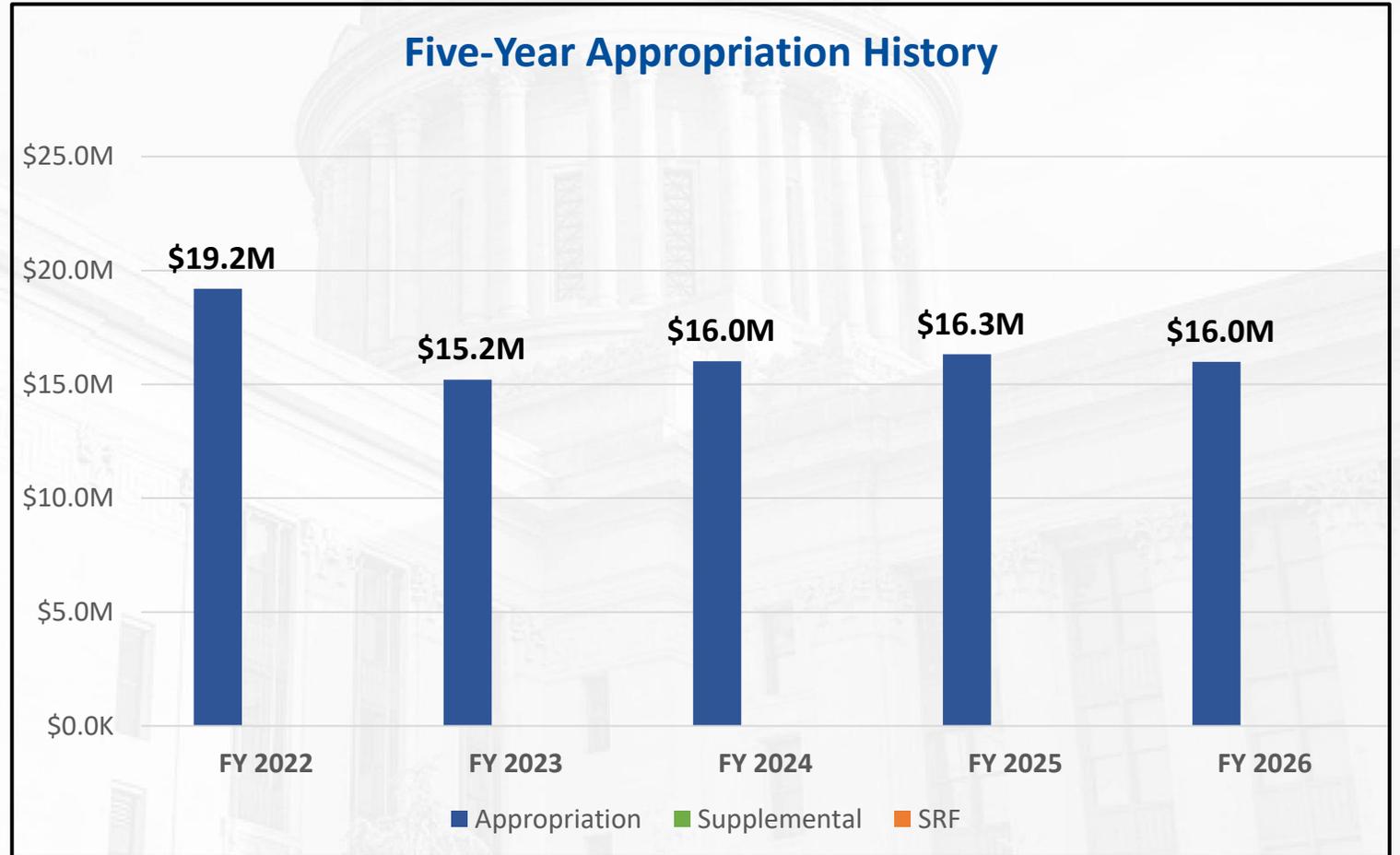


# FY 2026 Budgeted Full Time Equivalents (FTE)

	FY 2026 Budgeted FTE
<b>Total FTE</b>	135
<b>Supervisor FTE</b>	11
<b>Supervisors to Total FTE Ratio (%)</b>	8.1%
<b>Current Budgeted but Unfilled FTE</b>	0

# Appropriation History

Fiscal Year	Legislated Appropriation (\$) (Includes supplementals and SRF/ARPA.)
FY 2022	\$19,200,000
FY 2023	\$15,206,144
FY 2024	\$16,019,144
FY 2025	\$16,319,144
FY 2026	\$15,992,761



*\*Includes Supplemental and Statewide Recovery Fund (ARPA) appropriations.*



# Financial Resource Analysis

Carryover	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Total appropriated carryover amount expended (\$)	\$2,073,637	\$2,384,036	\$2,455,995	\$1,548,030

Historical Cash Balances	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Year End Revolving Fund Cash Balances <i>(All Revolving Funds)</i>	\$7,394,482.32	\$7,228,323.54	\$7,034,267.11	\$2,698,655.71

Revolving Class Fund # <i>(Unrestricted only)</i>	Revolving Class Fund Name <i>(Unrestricted only)</i>	Current cash balance (\$)	Projected FY 2026 year-end cash balance (\$)
20000	Medical Examiner Special Fund	\$1,938,764.56	\$531,198.50
#		\$	\$
#		\$	\$
#		\$	\$
#		\$	\$
#		\$	\$
Total Unrestricted Revolving Fund Cash balance:		\$	\$



*Unrestricted funds are those that are not limited by state or federal law, rule, regulation, other legally binding method, or donor restriction.*

# FY 2024 – 2025 Appropriation Change Review

<i>Purpose of appropriation increase or decrease</i>	<i>Amount FY 2024</i>	<i>Amount FY 2025</i>	<i>Total amount received FY 2024 - 25</i>	<i>Total amount expended by 11/1/2025</i>	<i>Included in FY 2026 approp? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If not expended fully, please explain.</i>
Recruitment & retention of Forensic professionals	\$813,000	\$	\$	\$	Partial	Recruitment & Retention of Forensic Professionals
Recruitment & Retention of Forensic Professionals	\$	\$300,000	\$	\$	No	Recruitment & Retention of Forensic Professionals
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
	\$	\$	\$	\$		
<b>Totals</b>	\$813,000	\$300,000	\$	\$		



*\*Do not include SRF / ARPA appropriation increases.*

# FY 2026 Appropriation Change Review

<i>Purpose of appropriation increase or decrease</i>	<i>Amount of increase or decrease (\$)</i>	<i>Does this need to be included in your FY 2027 appropriation? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If yes, included in appropriation for same purpose? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If not included for same purpose, please explain.</i>
Efficiency Decrease	-\$326,383	No		Appropriations mandated a 2% reduction in funding
	\$			
	\$			
	\$			
	\$			
	\$			
	\$			
	\$			
<b>Total adjustment</b>	<b>-\$326,383</b>			



*\*Do not include SRF / ARPA appropriation increases.*

# Incremental & Supplemental Request Summary

Request Name		FY 2027 Incremental Appropriation Request Amount (\$) {or FY 2026 for Supplementals}	Type of Request: Recurring, One-time, or Supplemental
1	Professional staff retention is essential to address rising caseloads and ensure compliance with accreditation standards mandated by Oklahoma Statute Title 74-150.37	\$3,500,000	Recurring
2	Supplemental funding to address escalating costs in essential operations—supplies, IT infrastructure, fleet rental, fuel and maintenance costs, and decedent transportation	\$1,000,000	Recurring
3		\$	
4		\$	
5		\$	



# (1) Supplemental Budget Request

## **Retention of Professional Forensic staff to maintain accreditation as required by Oklahoma Statute Title 74 150.37**

Type: Supplemental

\$3,500,000

Funding is requested to cover payroll costs now that the available cash in the Medical Examiner Special Fund has been depleted. Additional payroll support is essential to maintain adequate staffing levels required to meet national standards and to retain NAME accreditation, as mandated by Oklahoma Statute Title 74, §150.37. It is essential to our agency to retain highly skilled Forensic staff including Forensic Pathologists, Forensic Chemists, Forensic Toxicologists, and Forensic Anthropologists. The field of forensic sciences is exceptionally competitive and chronically understaffed. Recruiting and retaining these professionals is an ongoing challenge that our agency faces and will continue to encounter in the future.

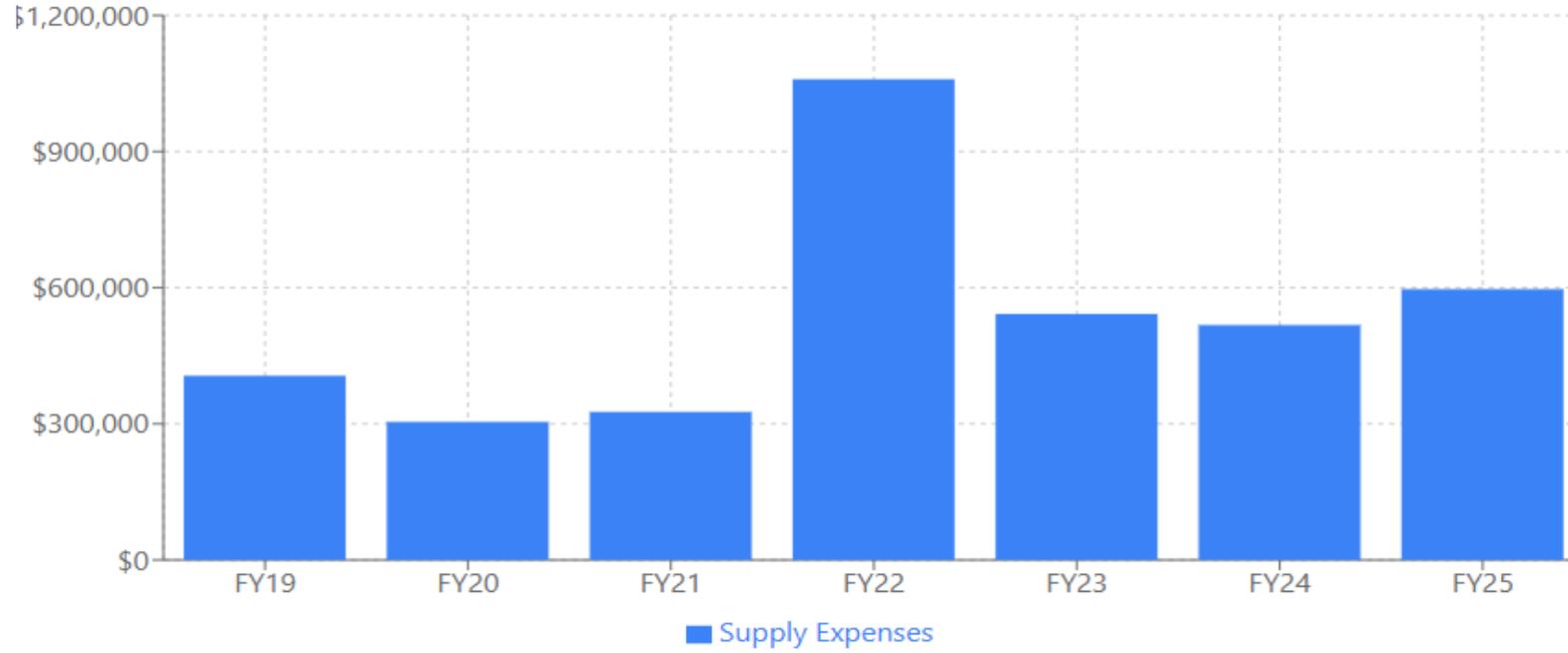


# (2) Supplemental Budget Request

<b>Increase in Operational Costs</b>	
Type: Supplemental	\$1,000,000
Increased costs in supplies, technology, and decedent transportation require supplemental funding to sustain critical operations. <i>*Please see following slides for statistical data*</i>	

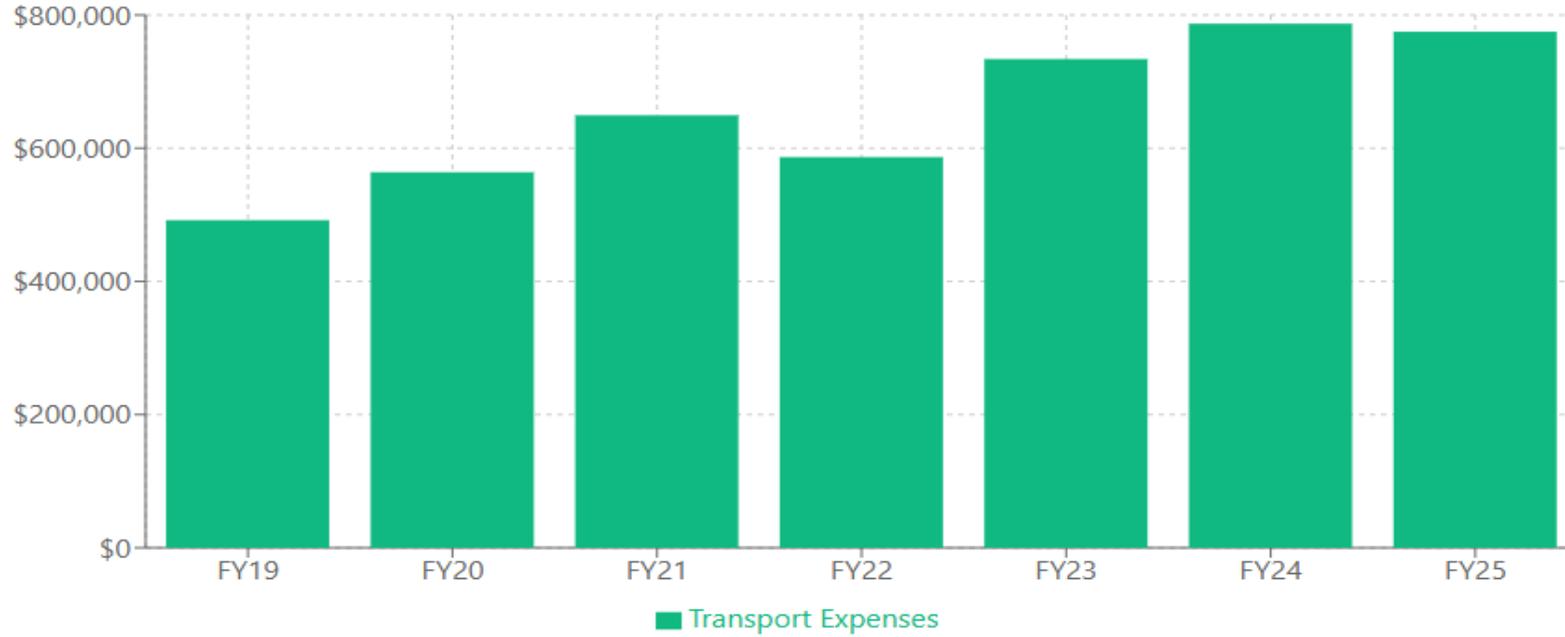


## Supply Expenses by Fiscal Year



Fiscal Year	Amount	Notes
FY19	\$406,080	
FY20	\$304,323	
FY21	\$326,281	
FY22	\$1,059,284	<i>Equipment purchased for new Tulsa office</i>
FY23	\$542,229	
FY24	\$517,771	
FY25	\$596,701	

## Transport Expenses by Fiscal Year



Fiscal Year	Amount	Notes
FY19	\$491,887	
FY20	\$563,993	
FY21	\$649,513	
FY22	\$586,691	
FY23	\$733,904	
FY24	\$786,941	
FY25	\$774,986	<i>Additional data may not be posted as of chart date</i>

# IT Expenses by Fiscal Year



Fiscal Year	Amount	Notes
FY20	\$881,809	
FY21	\$1,672,915	
FY22	\$2,148,292	<i>Large equipment purchased for new Tulsa office</i>
FY23	\$1,826,508	
FY24	\$1,593,559	
FY25	\$1,596,942	