

RETENTION OF ORGANS/HUMAN PARTS

Muskegon County Office of the Medical Examiner

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In some cases, it is necessary for the medical examiner to retain one or more organs or human parts so that special tests or examinations may be conducted to determine or document the cause, manner, and circumstances of death. Sometimes, the organ (such as brain, heart, eyes, or other organ) may need to be kept even though the deceased body has been released to the funeral home.

When this occurs, the funeral and burial or cremation may occur before the medical examiner completes the examination of the retained organ. In such cases, the medical examiner will retain the organ for a minimum of 90 days. If no request is made by the family to obtain the organ, a disposition will then be made by the medical examiner sometime after the 90-day period. This is usually accomplished by incineration.

When an organ is retained by the medical examiner, it is office policy to indicate in the autopsy report that the organ has been retained. It is the responsibility of the legal next-of-kin to contact the medical examiner if return of the organ is desired. In such cases, return can be coordinated with the funeral director who took care of the funeral arrangements in the case. Organs are retained only when necessary to facilitate proper examination. In most cases, no whole organs are retained.