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INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Unidentified Human Remains in the United States: Policy and Practice

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This consent document does not describe a request made by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). AAFS is neither conducting nor endorsing this research/survey. Instead, AAFS is sending this on behalf of a member to assist in the recruitment of participants. Any specific questions regarding the participation request should be directed to Dr. Jennifer Spence ([jes322@txstate.edu](mailto:jes322@txstate.edu)) or Dr. Kate Spradley ([ms78@txstate.edu](mailto:ms78@txstate.edu)).

You are receiving this document because of your association with an agency or office that has oversight over the disposition of unidentified human remains. My colleagues and I are hoping that you or someone in your office will complete an online survey contributing to a greater understanding of policy and practice regarding unidentified human remains in the U.S.

We ask that no more than one person in any office or agency complete the survey. If you do not feel that you are the most appropriate person to complete the survey, please forward the email and survey link to a colleague in your agency or office who may be interested.

Participation is completely voluntary. You must be at least 18 years old to complete the survey.

Following the 24 survey questions regarding unidentified human remains in the United States are 6 questions concerning the AAFS Academy Standards Board (ASB). If you are an anthropologist or practicing in an anthropology-related field, we ask that you answer these 6 questions. Your answers to these 6 questions will be anonymously shared with the AAFS Office of the Executive Director in an effort to increase awareness of the AAFS ASB. The 6 questions concerning the AAFS ASB have not been reviewed by and do not fall under the purview of the Texas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Purpose and Significance

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by faculty and graduate students in the Department of Anthropology at Texas State University. Our research investigates current policy and practice surrounding unidentified human remains in the United States. The first goal of our research is to provide forensic practitioners, government officials, law enforcement, and the general public—including communities and families of decedents—a guide to the laws and policies pertaining to unidentified human remains in each of the 50 states. The second part of our research involves investigating the



number of unidentified human remains cases in each state and how individual medicolegal agencies manage the disposition of unidentified human remains in practice.

Our research will result in an informative, practical, and relevant resource regarding unidentified human remains in the U.S., and it will facilitate the evaluation of the efficacy and implementation of existing policy. Additionally, by assessing practitioner satisfaction with existing policies, our research will highlight areas in which the forensic science community may reform procedures and protocols for the disposition of unidentified human remains.

We plan to disseminate results of our research in the following formats: academic journal articles, academic conference presentations, academic conference posters, and/or book chapters. These publications and presentations will assist those with jurisdictional authority or a vested interest in the unidentified deceased in better understanding what state laws govern the disposition of unidentified human remains and how policy is enacted in practice.

### Risk and Confidentiality

This research presents no more than minimal risk to survey respondents. The survey is anonymous, but please keep in mind that your identity may become known to the investigators if you provide potentially identifying information, such as your place of employment and position. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Only the members of the research team and the Texas State University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) may access the data. The ORC monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Survey participants' answers will not be shared with their employer(s). Your name will not be used in any written reports or publications which result from this research. Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the research is completed and then destroyed.

### Benefits and Compensation

There are no direct benefits to survey respondents. However, this research contributes to a greater understanding and possible reform of the policies and practices regarding the disposition of unidentified human remains in the U.S. In addition, it will generate data permitting evaluation of the efficacy and implementation of existing policy. Survey respondents will receive no compensation for their participation in this research.

### Online Survey

The survey contains 24 questions and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You may skip questions and return to them and/or refrain from answering any question. If you would prefer not to participate in our research, please do not complete the survey. If you consent to participate in our research, please complete the survey using the link here:



[Unidentified Human Remains in the U.S. Survey](#)

(If the above link does not work, please copy and paste this URL into the address of your Web browser [https://txstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3w64yLisRf3ZuV7](https://txstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3w64yLisRf3ZuV7))

Contact Information

Should you have questions or require additional information about our research or the survey, please contact Dr. Spence ([jes322@txstat.edu](mailto:jes322@txstat.edu)) or Dr. Spradley ([ms78@txstate.edu](mailto:ms78@txstate.edu)).

IRB Approval

This research was approved by the Texas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 7315 on July 21, 2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Denise Gobert at (512) 716-2652, [dgobert@txstate.edu](mailto:dgobert@txstate.edu), or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager, at (512) 245-2334, [meg201@txstate.edu](mailto:meg201@txstate.edu).

If you would prefer not to participate, please do not fill out a survey.

If you consent to participate, please complete the survey.

