



Charleston County Coroner's Office News Release

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Coroner to Hold Inquest on Oct. 5 for 2-year-old Ginny Hughes

[Charleston County Coroner Rae H. Wooten](#) will hold an inquest into the death of Ginny Hughes, 2 years of age, who died at MUSC on July 4, 2012.

The inquest will begin at 9 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 5, in the first floor Courtroom B125 in the Lonnie Hamilton, III Public Services Building located at 4045 Bridge View Drive in North Charleston.

The purpose of the inquest is to obtain testimony so that a jury can gather information, deliberate and deliver a finding on the "manner" of death.

"I have not yet ruled on the manner of death for this toddler," Wooten said. "An inquest is a powerful tool for gathering facts, and at the end of the day, the jury is charged with delivering a 'verdict' as to the manner of death."

In South Carolina, there are five manners of death: natural, accidental, suicide, homicide and undetermined.

Wooten said an inquest is a judicial proceeding in which jurors are drawn from the normal jury pool, seeking six with one alternate, instead of the usual 12 with one alternate. The coroner subpoenas witnesses for their testimony, and acts as the judge.

"The biggest difference with an inquest is that the jurors may ask questions, and attorneys can't participate except to the extent that the coroner allows," Wooten said. "Jurors have been summoned and witnesses have been subpoenaed for the Oct. 5 inquest."

SIDEBAR

Coroner Rae Wooten was born, raised and educated in Columbia, South Carolina before moving to the Charleston area in 1973. She graduated from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, and subsequently worked as an RN in various settings before joining the Charleston County Coroner's Office in April 1995. She became Chief Deputy Coroner in July 1996 and continued in that position until September 1, 2006 when she was appointed by the governor to complete the term of the previous coroner upon her resignation. She was subsequently elected to her first four-year term in 2008 and is a candidate for re-election in November 2012.

Charleston County Coroner's Office

- The Charleston County Coroner's Office conducts independent investigations of deaths in Charleston County, serving as a representative of the decedents and survivors. The investigation's purpose is to determine the manner of death and ensure that the circumstances surrounding it are thoroughly understood.

- **Functions:**
 - Performs independent investigations into traumatic deaths, deaths that occur outside of hospitals and deaths that occur suddenly or unexpectedly
 - Notifies families when unexpected deaths occur, such as in traffic fatalities or homicides
 - Makes positive identification of individuals who have died
 - Conducts inquests
 - Creates reports that relate to deaths investigated by the Office
 - Issues burial transit permits for individuals who have died outside of a hospital
 - Provides autopsy and Coroner's reports to agencies and next of kin
 - Makes the final determination as to the manner of death
 - Releases personal effects to the next of kin
 - Acts as the central depository for all records relative to a death, including the Medical Examiner's Report, police investigative reports and any other investigative agencies' reports
 - Maintains the County Coroner's Book of Inquisitions with records dating back to 1878
 - Issues cremation permits
 - Offers prevention programs for schools. Topics include drinking and driving, weapons awareness and alcohol and drug abuse.

- **The office does not:**
 - Perform autopsies
 - Issue death certificates
 - Provide burial services

- **For more information**, visit <http://charlestoncounty.org/elected/coroner.htm>

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- written by Jennie Flinn –