

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1032

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to death investigations.

Brief Description: Providing county reimbursement for selected transportation of human remains.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Haugen, Ferguson, Cooper, Nealey and Chandler.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Local Government, February 5, 1991, DP;
Appropriations, February 19, 1991, DP;
Passed House, March 19, 1991, 98-0;
Amended by Senate;
House concurred;
Passed Legislature, 96-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 15 members:
Representatives Haugen, Chair; Cooper, Vice Chair; Ferguson,
Ranking Minority Member; Mitchell, Assistant Ranking
Minority Member; Bray; Edmondson; Franklin; Horn; Nealey;
Nelson; Rayburn; Roland; Wood; Wynne; and Zellinsky.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 23 members:
Representatives Locke, Chair; Inslee, Vice Chair; Spanel,
Vice Chair; Silver, Ranking Minority Member; Morton,
Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appelwick; Bowman;
Brekke; Dorn; Ferguson; Fuhrman; Hine; Lisk; May; McLean;
Mielke; Nealey; Peery; Pruitt; Rust; H. Sommers; Valle; and
Wineberry.

Staff: Karl Herzog (786-7271).

Background: A county is not allowed to charge for the removal of any body to the county morgue or for the care of

a body at the county morgue. After investigation, and at the request of relatives or friends, a body shall be delivered to friends at any point in the city without charge.

A fellowship program in forensic pathology has been created at the University of Washington's School of Medicine to train one person a year in forensic pathology.

The state toxicology laboratory is overseen by a nine-member state death investigation council, consisting of various law enforcement officials, one state legislator, and one pathologist in private practice. This council and the president of the University of Washington control the laboratory's operations and make recommendations on cost-efficient improvements in death investigations.

Three dollars of the charge imposed for issuing a certified copy of certain vital statistic records, such as a death certificate, is placed into the death investigations account and used to finance various activities, including the state toxicology laboratory, the state dental investigation system, the state death investigations council, and the state forensic pathology fellowship program.

Summary of Bill: The county shall pay the reasonable costs of transporting human remains whenever a coroner or medical examiner assumes jurisdiction over human remains and directs the remains to be transported by a funeral establishment and either the funeral establishment transporting the remains is not providing the funeral or disposition services or the funeral establishment providing the funeral or disposition services is required to transport the remains to a facility other than its own.

Any transportation costs or other costs incurred after the coroner or medical examiner releases jurisdiction over human remains shall not be borne by the county, except for the responsibility of the county to pay for the burial of indigent persons, and indigent veterans and their family members, or if such costs are incurred by the county while operating a county cemetery.

The state death investigations council and the chairperson of the Pathology Department of the University of Washington's School of Medicine jointly shall administer the state forensic pathology fellowship program and determine the program's budget and the annual salary of the fellow.

The statute that provides for disbursements from the death investigations account is altered to clarify that disbursements are made to: (1) the state toxicology

laboratory; (2) counties for the costs of certain autopsies, (3) the University of Washington for the state forensic pathology fellowship program; (4) the state patrol to partially fund the dental identification system; (5) the criminal justice training commission for training county coroners, medical examiners, and their staffs, and (6) the state death investigations council.

The Washington State Death Investigations Council shall develop training on the subject of sudden, unexplained child death. The training shall be offered to responders, coroners, medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys serving as coroners, and investigators, on both a voluntary basis through their various associations and as a course offering at the Criminal Justice Training Center.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (Local Government): This clarifies the law and provides for an equitable allocation of costs. This is a compromise proposal. The annual salary for the fellowship program needs adjusting. The death investigations account funds very useful parts of our criminal investigations.

(Appropriations): There is a critical shortage of forensic pathologists state-wide. This bill would allow the University of Washington Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program to attract qualified pathologists.

Testimony Against: (Local Government): None.

(Appropriations): None.

Witnesses: (Local Government): Judy Arnold, Thurston County Coroner; Jim Goche, Washington Association of County Elected Officials; George Ishii, State Death Investigation Council; T. K. Bentler, Washington State Funeral Directors Association and Dr. Barbara C. Andersen, Island County Coroner. (All Pro).

(Appropriations): Jim Goche, WACO; John Howard, Pierce County Medical Examiner; Judy Arnold, Thurston County Coroner.