

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6380

AS OF FEBRUARY 3, 1992

Brief Description: Revising the procedures for death certificates and burial-transit permits.

SPONSORS: Senators Bauer and McCaslin

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Martin Lovinger (786-7443)

Hearing Dates: February 6, 1992

BACKGROUND:

There are situations in which funerals are delayed and other hardships are experienced because funeral directors are unable to obtain death certificates in a timely manner. Some of the delays are due to failure of attending physicians to sign the death certificate. Without a valid death certificate, no burial-transit permit can be issued and the body cannot be buried or removed.

SUMMARY:

Death certificates must be filed within three working days after a death is known. If the place of death is unknown, the location where the body is found will be listed as the place of death. If death occurs in a moving conveyance, the death must be registered in Washington. The location in the state where the body is first removed will be the place of death, unless the death occurred in international waters or airspace, or in the waters or air space of another country. In that case the certificate will be filed in Washington, but the actual place of death will be shown.

The funeral director who first assumes custody of the body has responsibility for filing the death certificate after obtaining the personal data from the next of kin or the best qualified source and after obtaining the cause of death from the attending physician, coroner, or medical examiner. The cause of death shall be completed by the physician in attendance at the time of death, or by the physician's designee.

If there was no physician or designee, or if they will not be available within 48 hours, then the certificate can be completed and signed by another physician, the coroner, the medical examiner, the chief medical officer of an institution where the decedent died, or the prosecuting attorney depending on the circumstances.

If the cause of death cannot be determined, the attending physician, coroner, or medical examiner shall state the cause of death is pending investigation and return the certificate to the funeral director.

The final disposition or removal from the state of the body must be authorized by the local registrar or deputy.

The state registrar may authorize electronic death registration and create a statewide death data base.

The Secretary of Health may authorize a funeral director or embalmer in each funeral home to serve as subdeputy registrar to receive and file death certificates and issue burial-transit permits.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested January 28, 1992