

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 2168

AS OF FEBRUARY 15, 1994

Brief Description: Authorizing certain counties to appoint a medical examiner to perform the duties of coroner.

SPONSORS: House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Ogden, Carlson, Springer, H. Myers, Morris and L. Johnson)

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Hearing Dates: February 21, 1994

BACKGROUND:

In general, the county coroner has jurisdiction over the remains of all deceased people who die suddenly when in apparent good health. The coroner has jurisdiction over any autopsies that are conducted. In most instances, the cost of an autopsy is paid by the county in which the autopsy is performed.

There is no requirement for a coroner to be certified as a forensic pathologist. When a coroner is not certified as a forensic pathologist, autopsies are frequently contracted out to people with more expertise to perform the autopsy. It has been asserted that it is cheaper for a county to have a trained medical examiner conduct autopsies in-house rather than contract with others to perform the autopsies. If larger counties are given the option to appoint medical examiners rather than elect coroners, then more autopsies could be conducted in-house.

SUMMARY:

If a noncharter county's population increases to 225,000 or more, the county legislative authority may adopt an ordinance or resolution providing for the consolidation of the office of coroner with the office of county commissioner. The ordinance or resolution must be adopted at least 30 days prior to the first day of filing for the primary election for county offices.

When the county legislative authority adopts such an ordinance or resolution, then no election is held for the office of coroner. The coroner's position is abolished following the expiration of the coroner's term of office. The county

legislative authority must appoint a medical examiner before the expiration of the county coroner's term of office.

In order to be appointed as a medical examiner by the county legislative authority, a person must be either certified as a forensic pathologist by the American Board of Pathology or be a qualified physician eligible to take the American Board of Pathology exam in forensic pathology within one year of being appointed. A physician who is appointed as a medical examiner but who is not certified as a forensic pathologist must pass the pathology exam within three years of being appointed.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.