

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6329

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As Passed Senate, February 12, 1998

**Title:** An act relating to disclosure of health care information without patient's authorization.

**Brief Description:** Providing for a certain disclosure of health care information without patient's authorization.

**Sponsors:** Senators Deccio, Thibaudeau, Wood and Loveland.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Health & Long-Term Care: 1/29/98, 2/6/98 [DP].  
Passed Senate, 2/12/98, 48-0.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Deccio, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Benton, Fairley, Franklin, Strannigan and Wojahn.

**Staff:** Rhoda Jones (786-7198)

**Background:** Currently health care providers may disclose health care information about a patient without the patient's authorization under circumstances specified in statute. As examples, these recipients may include other health care providers who are caring for the patient, other providers who have previously cared for the patient, persons who need the information to protect the patient or others, and federal, state or local law enforcement authorities.

County coroners and medical examiners serve in an official capacity to determine the cause and manner of death. Coroners in counties of under 40,000 may be the county's prosecuting attorney. In counties over 40,000, coroners are elected. There are no specific credentials associated with this position. By statute they may act as sheriff in certain circumstances. Medical examiners are forensic pathologists.

While current law permits the disclosure of patient health information to law enforcement officials, there is no clear statutory authority for this information to be released to county coroners.

**Summary of Bill:** County coroners and medical examiners are specifically allowed to receive health care information from health care providers.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** None.

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

**Testimony For:** This will clarify that medical examiners and coroners have access to patient health records for the purpose of determining the cause of death.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** PRO: Martha Reed, president, Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners.