

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1069

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Ways & Means, April 2, 1999

Title: An act relating to investigations of multiple deaths.

Brief Description: Authorizing the forensic investigations council to make expenditures to assist in investigations of multiple deaths.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Scott, Mulliken and O'Brien).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 3/31/99, 4/2/99 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Chair; Bauer, Vice Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Kline, Kohl-Welles, McDonald, Rasmussen, Rossi, B. Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Thibaudeau, West, Winsley and Zarelli.

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: The Washington State Forensic Investigations Council (WSFIC) performs several functions related to death investigations as part of the state's criminal justice system. The WSFIC and the University of Washington jointly oversee the State Toxicology Laboratory and the state forensic pathology fellowship program. The WSFIC also approves the state crime laboratory and toxicology laboratory budgets. Further, the authorizing statute requires the WSFIC to study and recommend cost-efficient improvements to the state's death investigations system.

The Death Investigations Account (DIA) pays for various activities associated with death investigations and is funded from part of the fees received by the Department of Health for copies of vital records. The State Treasurer makes disbursements from the DIA to the WSFIC and to various entities, including:

- the State Toxicology Laboratory;
- the Criminal Justice Training Commission for training county coroners;
- the Washington State Patrol for partial funding of the state dental identification system;
- the University of Washington to fund the state forensic pathology fellowship program;
- counties for the cost of autopsies; and
- medical examiners and their staff.

Summary of Bill: Within funds appropriated for this purpose, the WSFIC is authorized to spend up to \$250,000 per biennium from the DIA to assist local jurisdictions to investigate multiple deaths involving unanticipated, extraordinary and catastrophic events, or involving multiple jurisdictions. The WSFIC is required to adopt rules for expending funds from the DIA for this purpose.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill is necessary to provide a more timely response when investigating deaths from major catastrophes in local communities. DNA testing is important in death investigations, yet it is very expensive and will not always get done in smaller communities. This bill will help aid communities financially, so they can perform the proper death investigations in a timely manner. This bill is not a fee increase and does not shift any funds. It merely gives the Forensic Investigations Council the authority to expend funds from the Death Investigations Account. This bill would help a local jurisdiction if a catastrophe like the TWA Flight 800 crash happened in Washington. Families were left behind in that disaster because it took so long to investigate all of the deaths. Passing this bill will help prevent the investigation delay and emotional strain on families if a catastrophe like that happened in our state.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Martha Reed, WA Assn. of Medical Examiners and Coroners; Debbie Wilke, WA Assn. of County Officials and Forensic Investigations.