

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6376

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 1, 2012

Title: An act relating to identification of human remains.

Brief Description: Increasing the authority of the forensic investigations council to assist local jurisdictions in identification of human remains.

Sponsors: Senator Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/31/12, 2/01/12 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kline, Chair; Harper, Vice Chair; Pflug, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Kohl-Welles and Padden.

Staff: Katherine Taylor (786-7434)

Background: The Washington State Forensic Investigations Council may do the following:

- meet at such times and places as may be designated by a majority vote of the council members;
- adopt rules governing the council and the conduct of its meetings;
- require reports from the Chief of the Washington State Patrol (WSP) on matters pertaining to the Bureau of Forensic Laboratory Services (Bureau);
- authorize the expenditure of up to \$250,000 per biennium from the council's death investigations account appropriation for the purpose of assisting local jurisdictions in the investigation of multiple deaths involving unanticipated, extraordinary, and catastrophic events, or involving multiple jurisdictions;
- authorize the expenditure of up to \$25,000 per biennium from the council's death investigations account appropriation for the purpose of assisting local jurisdictions to secure forensic anthropology services or other testing, to determine the identity of human remains upon a showing of financial need;
- do anything, necessary or convenient, which enables the council to perform its duties and to exercise its powers; and

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- be actively involved in the preparation of the Bureau's budget and approve the Bureau's budget prior to formal submission to the Office of Financial Management;

The council does the following:

- prescribes qualifications for the position of Director of the Bureau, after consulting with the Chief of the WSP;
- the council appoints a toxicologist as State Toxicologist;
- establishes the policies, objectives, and priorities of the Bureau to be implemented and administered within constraints established by budgeted resources by the Director of the Bureau;
- sets the salary for the Director of the Bureau; and
- sets the salary for the State Toxicologist.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Forensic Investigations Council may authorize the expenditure of up to \$210,000 per biennium from the death investigations account for the purpose of assisting local jurisdictions to secure forensic anthropology services or other testing, to determine the identity of human remains. The council contracts with a county coroner or medical examiner to secure the required staff, facility storage, and equipment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This is a fantastic bill. Forensic anthropology services are already being provided by King County to all counties and it is very helpful. King County does a great job. We currently use a federal grant to fund King Counties' services. If we run out of grant money, it would be helpful to authorize the use of more money. There is not a lot of money left in the applicable account to authorize for forensic anthropology. Forensic anthropology is essential for death investigations and helps identify nonhuman v. human remains, among other things. Currently, counties do not pay anything for these services except King County because of the federal grant. The other counties do not have enough money to cover these services. This will not displace funds that are available for other services. We are confident that we can fund this program out of the applicable fund with fees that are charged.

Persons Testifying: PRO: James McMahan, WA Assn. County Officials, Greg Sandstrom, FIC, Richard Haicuff, King County Medical Examiners Office.