

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 6261

C 221 L 16
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Concerning human remains.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Padden, Pedersen and Miloscia).

Senate Committee on Law & Justice
House Committee on Public Safety

Background: Under current law, county coroners and medical examiners have the same legal authority, duties, and responsibilities. Smaller counties generally have a coroner while large urban counties have a medical examiner. Coroners are elected officials trained as death investigators and as county administrators. Medical examiners are appointed officials trained in forensic pathology.

A person who knows the location of a dead body must notify the county coroner or medical examiner unless the person has good reason to believe that the coroner has already been notified. Failure to notify is a misdemeanor. A person who moves or conceals a dead body under the coroner's or medical examiner's jurisdiction without authorization is guilty of a gross misdemeanor. Due to advances in the science of death investigation, a coroner's or medical examiner's jurisdiction may be warranted when any human remains are found whether or not identified as a human body. Some laws have not been updated to reflect the co-equal responsibilities of coroners and medical examiners and their current terminology.

Summary: Anyone who knows about the existence and location of human remains including but not limited to skeletal remains under RCW 68.50.645 and RCW 27.44.055 must report to the coroner, medical examiner, or law enforcement unless they have good reason to believe the coroner or medical examiner has already been notified. Failure to report is a misdemeanor. Human remains under the coroner's or medical director's custody and not claimed by a relative or friend must not be moved or disturbed without authorization. Knowingly interfering with human remains without authorization is a gross misdemeanor. When deciding whether to retain jurisdiction over human or skeletal remains as provided in RCW 68.50.645, RCW 27.44.055, or RCW 68.50.010, a coroner or medical examiner shall consider the deceased person's religious beliefs, and associated death and burial traditions.

Votes on Final Passage:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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| Senate | 46 | 0 | |
| House | 97 | 0 | (House amended) |
| Senate | 47 | 0 | (Senate concurred) |

Effective: June 9, 2016