

HB 2147 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Carrier: Rep. Goodwin

House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Action Date: 03/16/23

Action: Do pass with amendments. (Printed A-Eng.)

Vote: 7-0-0-0

Yeas: 7 - Conrad, Dexter, Evans, Grayber, Hieb, Lewis, Tran

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 1/19, 3/16

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs county governing boards to designate veterans' remains coordinators to identify unclaimed human remains located within the county, establish eligibility for interment, and cause interment at a national cemetery. Outlines information that veterans' remains coordinators must provide to county veterans' service officers. Outlines process for transferring remains, identity, and eligibility information of remains. Outlines responsibilities of county veterans' service officers in process. Outlines responsibility of entities that may be in possession of remains of indigent persons.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Importance of dignified burial and recognition for veterans
- Anecdotes of successful efforts to inter veterans
- Changes from House Bill 4082 A (2022)

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Revises definitions. Specifies "funeral establishment" as opposed to entity in possession. References "unclaimed cremated remains" instead of "unclaimed human remains." Specifies that release of remains be to a person authorized under rules promulgated by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, rather than to the veterans' remains coordinator. Prohibits civil claims against funeral establishments in possession of remains of eligible individuals, except in cases of gross negligence, or for subsequent action taken by veterans' remains coordinator. Requires veterans' remains coordinator, rather than county veterans' service officer, to submit report to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Eliminates reference to cemetery authority, crematory operator, disposition facility operator, and licensed funeral service practitioner, from reporting requirement after taking custody of unclaimed body of deceased person.

BACKGROUND:

Cremation has become a more common option for the interment of human remains. The National Funeral Directors Association estimated that cremation was the option for 57.5 percent of deceased individuals in 2021, up from 54.8 percent in 2013. The national cremation rate is expected to reach nearly 80 percent by 2035, which would represent roughly 2.8 million cremations per year.

Any member of the U.S. Armed Forces who dies while on active duty, or veterans who are discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, may be eligible for burial in a national cemetery. This benefit also applies to spouses and dependents of veterans. However, burial benefits do not always include covering the cost of the burial.

There have been instances, both in Oregon and elsewhere, of the cremated remains of veterans being discovered and unclaimed, and thus uninterred. House Bill 2147 A directs counties to designate one or more "veterans'

This summary has not been adopted or officially endorsed by action of the committee.

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remains coordinators” to work in a volunteer capacity to identify unclaimed cremated or reduced remains located within the county, establish the eligibility of the individual for interment in a national cemetery, and arrange for the interment of the remains. Unlike the previous iteration of the measure (House Bill 4082 A, 2022 Session), House Bill 2147 A specifies that a designated veterans' remains coordinator may be either an unpaid volunteer or a county staff person, provided that county staff performing the duty may not be compensated for doing so.