

February 13, 2023

Representative Kropf, Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary  
900 Court Street, NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kimberly DiLeo. I am the Chief Medicolegal Death Investigator with the Multnomah County Medical Examiner's Office. I am here today to testify in support of HB 2519.

HB 2519 will preserve the integrity of human remains donations by banning the for-profit display of human remains statewide. Currently, counties outside of Multnomah County lack the authority to stop events such as the one seen in a downtown hotel meeting room in 2021.

In 2021, we had never heard of an event like this. A media company with no professional credentials ultimately dissected a human body that had been donated to science for medical research, to a paying audience.

The decedent was a World War II veteran, whose widow found out about the public autopsy via media outlets. After the event took place, it was reported that the veteran had died of Coronavirus.

Before this autopsy was conducted in a hotel conference room, I was made aware of the event through colleagues who saw advertisements on-line. I immediately contacted the management at the hotel where the event was to be held and was told the event was presented to them as a medical device training. The Director of Sales did further research, and called back to say they were canceling the event.

Unfortunately, another hotel rescheduled the event. I called the Director of Sales at that hotel to implore them to cancel, but they declined, despite our expressed concerns regarding public health and respectful treatment of the deceased.

I then contacted the Portland Police Bureau to report my concerns surrounding the acceptable treatment of human remains. They said it was a civil matter, and they could not get involved.

I contacted the Oregon Medical Board to investigate whether the promoter was licensed for this kind of event.

Our Multnomah County Health Officer reviewed event information with senior leaders at the Oregon Health Authority about the need for infection control precautions depending on how the body was preserved and handled.

Despite several attempts, OHA was unable to reach the hotel or the event sponsors for details.

OSHA and CDC guidelines, for instance, require PPE when handling the deceased. While we expected the risk of infection to participants to be very low, we were unable to get information in real time about what precautions would be in place.

In my profession, we work with thousands of families and I can tell you from experience, that everyone who dies is a real person with someone who loves them.

They deserve to be treated with dignity. Donating one's body to science is a gift: to students, to science, and really to the public. Multnomah County passed a ban similar to the one in HB 2519 in the spring of 2022.

HB 2519 will provide law enforcement the authority to stop such an event in the future, maintaining the highest public health and public safety standards.

Lastly, the bill preserves the ability to display human remains for legitimate ceremonial and educational purposes such as those by funeral homes and accredited museums and universities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2519.

Respectfully,  
Kimberly DiLeo  
Multnomah County Medical Examiner's Office