

March 20, 2023

Senator Prozanski, Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 953 Testimony

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 953, which largely serves to update ORS language to reflect terminology currently used by staff in the Medical Examiner field. One area of concern with the bill as drafted conditions autopsies by the Chief Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO) on sufficient capacity to perform the autopsy. We would prefer to see more of a collaborative decision making process when capacity issues arise.

This concern is made more relevant with the recent notification from the SMEO that due to short staffing beginning July 1st of this year, services to 14 Oregon counties would be discontinued. Without sufficient time to plan for a transition, we are concerned that the staffing challenges the SMEO is experiencing will just be transferred to the counties causing significant delays and impacting our ability to be responsive to our community.

To address the current capacity concerns at the SMEO, we respectfully request that SB 953 be amended to include funding for recruitment and retention and to bring compensation up to a more competitive level and that a workgroup be formed to bring the State and counties together to plan for the transition and develop a new statewide Medical Examiner system that serves the community.

Thank you,
Stacy Cowan
Multnomah County Government Relations