

SB 1550 -1, -3 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Judiciary

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Meeting Dates: 2/2, 2/4, 2/16

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs law enforcement, before making a finding as to the cause or manner of a death, to interview family members of the decedent regarding domestic violence or child abuse when certain conditions are present.

Detailed Summary:

The measure requires that if a decedent who is suspected to have died from suicide, overdose or accident has previously been identified as a victim of domestic violence or actual or suspected child abuse, and at least three of the listed conditions are met, law enforcement must interview family members of the decedent. If law enforcement determines it is reasonable to suspect the death of the decedent may be the result of domestic violence or child abuse, the measure requires law enforcement to request an autopsy from the district medical examiner. The measure directs the medical examiner to conduct an autopsy on the decedent when certain conditions are met.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Cause of death is about criminal prosecution, and closure for families
- Based on Joanna's law in California ([SB 989 \(2023-2024\)](#))
- Discussion regarding the failures of death investigations
- Requirements that families are notified of their rights
- Ensures that if an abuse history exists, the case will be investigated

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Removes the newly created term "partner" and replaces it with the established term "family or household member." Allows a medical-legal death examiner to submit for an autopsy in addition to an investigator or officer. Instead of directing an autopsy when the scene of the death suggests death by suicide overdose or accident, expands to suicide, accident or other undetermined cause. Adds language stating that if law enforcement and the medical examiner find that the death was not a homicide and close the case, then a family member may examine the case and obtain records related to the decedent's case.

-3 Removes requirement that officer shall submit a written request to the medical examiner for the performance of an autopsy when certain circumstances are met and instead requires the officer to request further examination of the body by the medical examiner and to consult with the medical examiner regarding appropriate actions related to potential homicide. Directs the medical examiner to cooperate in the consultation. Modifies formatting in section 3 for clarity.

BACKGROUND:

Pursuant to ORS 146.090 and 146.095, Oregon law requires the medical examiner and district attorney to investigate and formally report on certain types of death, including but not limited to apparent homicides, suicides, and drug overdoses. Pursuant to ORS 146.177, the medical examiner and district attorney have discretion to order an autopsy in any death requiring such an investigation.

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Over a third of adults in Oregon experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and intimate partners are responsible for approximately one in five homicides nationwide. Secretary of State, [Domestic Violence](#), (last visited February 6, 2026). In 2022, an estimated 1,990 children died from abuse and neglect in the United States, reflecting a rising trend. National Children's Alliance, [National Statistics on Child Abuse](#), (last visited February 6, 2026).

PRELIMINARY