

SB 1550 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Judiciary

Action Date: 02/16/26

Action: Do pass with amendments and requesting referral to Ways and Means. (Printed A-Engrossed.)

Vote: 6-0-0-0

Yeas: 6 - Broadman, Gelser Blouin, Manning Jr, McLane, Prozanski, Thatcher

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure 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:

Requires that if a decedent is suspected to have died from suicide, accident, or other undetermined cause, has previously been identified as a victim of domestic violence or actual or suspected child abuse, and at least three specified conditions are met, then law enforcement must interview family members of the decedent and review any documented evidence of historical abuse.

If law enforcement determines it is reasonable to suspect the death of the decedent may be the result of domestic violence or child abuse, requires law enforcement to contact the medical examiner to request additional examination of the decedent's body and consult with the examiner regarding additional appropriate actions related to a potential homicide. Directs the medical examiner to respond to the request and collaborate with law enforcement.

States 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 records and obtain documents related to the decedent's case. Directs law enforcement to provide notice to the decedent's family explaining their rights and the processes under this act.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Purpose and effect of determining the cause of death
- Joanna's law in California, [SB 989](#) (2023–2024)
- Failures of death investigations
- Notice to families of their rights
- Investigation of deceased persons with a history of abuse

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

The amendment allows a medical-legal death examiner to request an autopsy in addition to an investigator or officer. It requires an autopsy when a scene of death suggests death by an undetermined cause. It removes the requirement that an officer submit a written request to the medical examiner for the performance of an autopsy when certain circumstances are met; the amendment 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. It directs the medical examiner to cooperate in the consultation. It adds language stating that if law enforcement and the medical examiner find that the death was not a homicide and close the

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case, then a family member may examine the case and obtain related records. It removes the novel term “partner” and replaces it with the legally established term “family or household member.” The amendment modifies the formatting in Section 3 for clarity.

BACKGROUND:

Pursuant to Oregon Revised Statutes (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.

According to the Oregon Secretary of State, 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. The [National Children’s Alliance](#) reported that in 2022, an estimated 1,990 children died from abuse and neglect in the United States, reflecting a rising trend.