

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6226

As Passed Senate, February 7, 1996

Title: An act relating to the appointment of a medical examiner in more populous counties.

Brief Description: Allowing appointment of a medical examiner in more populous counties.

Sponsors: Senators Bauer, Moyer, Haugen and Winsley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 1/22/96, 1/31/96 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/7/96, 35-14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Sheldon, Vice Chair; Goings, Hale, Heavey and Winsley.

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Background: Except as provided by home rule charter, all counties with a population of more than 40,000 have an elected coroner. In counties with a population of less than 40,000, no coroner is elected and the prosecuting attorney is the ex officio coroner.

Summary of Bill: In a county of 250,000 or more (noncharter Spokane and Clark), the county legislative authority may, upon majority vote at an election called by the county legislative authority, adopt a system under which a medical examiner may be appointed to replace the office of coroner. After adoption of a resolution or ordinance creating the office of medical examiner, at least 30 days prior to the first day of filing for the primary election of county offices, the resolution or ordinance is referred to the voters at the next date for a special election that is more than 45 days from the date of adoption of the resolution or ordinance. If approved by the voters, the coroner's position is abolished following the expiration of the coroner's term. The county legislative authority must appoint a medical examiner to assume the statutory duties performed by the county coroner.

To be appointed as a medical examiner a person either must be certified as a forensic pathologist by the American Board of Pathology, or a qualified physician eligible to take the board's exam in forensic pathology within one year of being appointed. A physician specializing in pathology who is appointed to the position of medical examiner and who is not certified as a forensic pathologist must pass the pathology exam within three years of the appointment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This is permissive legislation and allows these two counties to bring greater expertise to death investigations.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Dr. Clifford Nelson, Clark Co. Coroner's office (pro); William Phillip Werschler, Spokane Co. Medical Society (pro); Cliff Webster, WA State Medical Assoc. (pro).