
Public Safety Committee

HB 1142

Brief Description: Enhancing the ability of a coroner to perform his or her duties.

Sponsors: Representatives Manweller and Haler.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows coroners to lawfully order persons to vacate the scene of a death until the coroner has completed his or her duties.
- Creates a misdemeanor crime for failure to comply with the lawful order of a coroner to vacate the scene of a death.

Hearing Date: 1/24/17

Staff: Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

Background:

The bodies of individuals who die suddenly, under unnatural or unlawful circumstances, or from violence, among other specified causes, are under the jurisdiction of the county coroner or medical examiner.

Coroners are assigned a variety of responsibilities under statute. When a person dies without making prior plans for the disposition of his or her body, and lacks anyone to provide for disposition, the coroner is responsible for entrusting the body to a funeral home in the county where the body is found. Coroners are also responsible for delivering money found on a body to the county treasurer, and for otherwise disposing of non-monetary personal property found on a body, unless claimed by the deceased person's relatives.

Additionally, coroners investigate found human remains, and have rights and duties regarding personal identification of remains, dissemination of information to the public, requesting autopsies, and determining whether or not remains are of a forensic nature. If the coroner suspects that the death of a person was unnatural, violent, resulted from unlawful means, resulted

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from suspicious circumstances, or was a suicide or homicide, he or she may authorize an inquest to render a verdict on the cause of death.

Summary of Bill:

When a coroner is at the scene of a death in the performance of his or her duties, the coroner may lawfully order persons to vacate the scene of the death until he or she has completed his or her duties. Failure to comply with the lawful order of a coroner to vacate the scene of a death is a misdemeanor.

The stated purpose of the act is to avoid prevention, hindrance, or impediment to the timely investigation of a death.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.