
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5542

State of Washington

52nd Legislature

1991 Regular Session

By Senate Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Senator Roach).

Read first time February 28, 1991.

1 AN ACT Relating to child death investigations and training; adding
2 a new section to chapter 43.103 RCW; and creating a new section.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds and declares that
5 sudden and unexplained child deaths are a leading cause of death for
6 children under age three. The public interest is served by research
7 and study of the potential causes and indications of such unexplained
8 child deaths and the prevention of inaccurate and inappropriate
9 designation of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) as a cause of death.
10 The legislature further finds and declares that law enforcement
11 officers, fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, and other first
12 responders in emergency situations are not adequately informed
13 regarding sudden, unexplained death in young children including but not
14 limited to sudden infant death syndrome, its signs and typical history,
15 and as a result may compound the family and child care provider's grief

1 through conveyed suspicions of a criminal act. Coroners,
2 investigators, and prosecuting attorneys are also in need of updated
3 training on the identification of unexplained death in children under
4 the age of three, including but not limited to sudden infant death
5 syndrome awareness and sensitivity and the establishment of a state-
6 wide uniform protocol in cases of sudden, unexplained child death.

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 43.103 RCW
8 to read as follows:

9 The council shall research and develop an appropriate training
10 component on the subject of sudden, unexplained child death, including
11 but not limited to sudden infant death syndrome. The training
12 component shall include, at a minimum:

13 (1) Medical information on sudden, unexplained child death for
14 first responders, including awareness and sensitivity in dealing with
15 families and child care providers, and the importance of forensically
16 competent death scene investigation;

17 (2) Information on community resources and support groups available
18 to assist families who have lost a child to sudden, unexplained death,
19 including sudden infant death syndrome;

20 (3) Development and adoption of an up-to-date protocol of
21 investigation in cases of sudden, unexplained child death, including
22 the importance of a consistent policy of thorough death scene
23 investigation, and an autopsy in unresolved cases as appropriate;

24 (4) The value of timely communication between the county coroner or
25 medical examiner and the public health department, when a sudden,
26 unexplained child death occurs, in order to achieve a better
27 understanding of such deaths, and connecting families to various
28 community and public health support systems to enhance recovery from
29 grief.

1 The council shall work with volunteer groups with expertise in the
2 area of sudden, unexplained child death, including but not limited to
3 the SIDS Northwest Regional Center at Children's Hospital, the
4 Washington chapter of the national SIDS foundation, and the Washington
5 association of county officials.

6 Upon development of an appropriate curriculum, agreed upon by the
7 council, the training module shall be offered to first responders,
8 coroners, medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys serving as coroners,
9 and investigators, both voluntarily through their various associations
10 and as a course offering at the criminal justice training center.