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**Children & Family Services  
Committee**

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**HB 1981**

**Brief Description:** Creating a joint task force on child death investigations.

**Sponsors:** Representative Dickerson.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes a joint task force on child death investigations to examine the statewide county coroner system and the investigations of child deaths.

**Hearing Date:** 3/3/03

**Staff:** Sonja Hallum (786-7092).

**Background:**

In Washington the county coroner is an elected official by statute, except that in a county with a population of less than 40,000 the prosecuting attorney acts as the coroner. In a county with a population of 250,000 or more, the county legislative authority may replace the office of coroner with a medical examiner system and appoint a medical examiner.

If the county legislative authority adopts a resolution or ordinance to replace the county coroner system with a medical examiner system the decision is referred to the voters. If the resolution or ordinance is approved by a majority vote no coroner will be elected. Instead, the county legislative authority appoints a medical examiner. To be appointed as a medical examiner a person must either be: (1) Certified as a forensic pathologist by the American board of pathology; or (2) a qualified physician eligible to take the American board of pathology 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.

In Washington each county is required to develop protocols for investigations and autopsies of unexplained deaths of children under the age of three as required in RCW 43.103.100. If the coroner conducts an autopsy of a child under the age of three whose death was sudden

and unexplained, RCW 68.50.104 requires the county to be reimbursed for the expenses of the autopsy when the death scene investigation and autopsy are conducted under the protocols which have been adopted by the county.

**Summary of Bill:**

A joint task force on child death investigations is established.

The membership of the task force shall consist of eight members from both the Senate and the House of Representative as follows:

HOUSE:

1. Two members of the Children & Family Services Committee
2. Two members of the Health Care Committee
3. Each of the two largest caucuses shall be represented

SENATE:

1. Two members of the Children & Family Services and Corrections Committee
2. Two members of the Health and Long-Term Care Committee
3. Each of the two largest caucuses shall be represented

The task force shall review the following issues:

1. Whether Washington should replace the current county coroner system with a state medical examiner system.
2. Whether there is a need to implement statewide rules to ensure uniformity in child death investigations.
3. Whether the protocols required under RCW 43.103.100 are being followed uniformly in Washington.
4. Whether coroners are being reimbursed for the costs of autopsies of children under the age of three as provided for in RCW 68.50.104.
5. Any other issues which the joint task force deems relevant to the intent of this act.

The task force shall appoint an advisory committee to provide input on the issues under review and shall report to the Legislature no later than December 1, 2003.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not Requested.

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