SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 5089

As of January 16, 2025

Title: An act relating to funding rural county coroners and medical examiners.

Brief Description: Concerning funding rural county coroners and medical examiners.

Sponsors: Senators Chapman and Short.

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Local Government: 1/16/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Legislature to appropriate and disburse sufficient funds to cover increased costs related to county coroners to counties with a population under 40,000 for fiscal years 2025 through 2030.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Rohan Bhattacharjee (786-7534)

Background: Most counties have either an elected coroner or an appointed medical examiner to administer the investigatory and medical side of certain death investigations in their jurisdiction. In 2021, the Legislature enacted ESHB 1326, relating to county coroners and medical examiners. ESHB 1326, among other things, required that effective January 1, 2025, a prosecuting attorney may no longer serve as the ex officio coroner for counties with a population size less than 40,000. In those counties, the coroner may be either elected or appointed by the county legislative authority.

Coroner Requirements. Coroners, medical examiners, and all other full-time medicolegal investigative personnel in a coroner or medical examiner's office must, within 12 months of being elected, appointed, or employed, complete medicolegal forensic investigation training developed by the Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) in conjunction with the

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Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, and a practicing physician selected by the CJTC.

The training must satisfy the recommendations of the National Commission of Forensic Science for certification and accreditation, and must cover sudden unexplained child death and the protocols for missing persons.

All coroners' and medical examiners' offices must be accredited by either the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, or the National Association of Medical Examiners by July 1, 2025.

Any county may enter into an interlocal agreement with an adjoining county for the provision of coroner or medical examiner services.

Summary of Bill: For fiscal years 2025 through 2030, the Legislature shall appropriate and disburse, to counties with a population of under 40,000, sufficient funds to cover the costs of any new or increased responsibilities relating to county coroners.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will aid 13 smaller counties struggling to meet the 2021 mandate for independent coroners, previously handled by county prosecutors. While beneficial for public outcomes, the 2021 mandate imposes significant financial burdens, requiring expenditure on staff, facilities, training, and technology. Temporary funding is requested over the next six years to help counties modernize and absorb these costs by 2031.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Paul Jewell, Washington State Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.