

# An Act

ENROLLED SENATE  
BILL NO. 207

By: Bice of the Senate

and

Osborn (Leslie) and  
McDaniel of the House

An Act relating to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; amending 63 O.S. 2011, Section 945, as amended by Section 14, Chapter 293, O.S.L. 2014 (63 O.S. Supp. 2016, Section 945), which relates to autopsy reports; providing procedures for requesting and receiving certain reports and findings; listing parties who shall receive certain reports and findings prior to those reports and findings becoming available to the public; requiring the withholding of certain reports and findings for certain time period; directing the production of certain summary reports; directing that certain summary reports be available to the public without delay; specifying contents of summary reports; providing timeline for release of certain reports and findings as a public record; providing exception; requiring certain written declaration; making such declaration an open record; providing procedures for requesting and receiving an extension of time before release of certain reports and findings as a public record; limiting extensions of time; prohibiting certain extensions of time; providing procedures for certain appeals; providing procedures for service of court orders; providing for certain nullification of extension of time; providing for expiration of opportunities to withhold certain reports; providing certain construction; amending 63 O.S. 2011, Section 1-329.1, which relates to cremation; providing statutory reference; deleting limitation on certain fee; making language gender-neutral; and providing an effective date.

SUBJECT: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 63 O.S. 2011, Section 945, as amended by Section 14, Chapter 293, O.S.L. 2014 (63 O.S. Supp. 2016, Section 945), is amended to read as follows:

Section 945. A. When properly authorized, an autopsy shall be performed by the Chief Medical Examiner or such person as may be designated by him or her for such purpose. The Chief Medical Examiner or a person designated by him or her may authorize arterial embalming of the body prior to the autopsy when such embalming would in his or her opinion not interfere with the autopsy. The extent of the autopsy shall be made as is deemed necessary by the person performing the autopsy.

B. A full and complete report of the facts developed by the autopsy together with the findings of the person making it shall be prepared and filed in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner without unnecessary delay. Copies of such reports and findings shall be furnished to district attorneys and law enforcement officers making a criminal investigation in connection with the death.

C. Upon receiving a written, signed and dated records request, a copy of the full and complete report of the facts developed by the autopsy, together with the findings of the person making the report, shall be released by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to the public in the most expedient manner available or as requested by the records requester and, under the following conditions, shall be furnished to:

1. District attorneys and any law enforcement agency with authority to make a criminal investigation in connection with the death; provided, such copies shall not be shared with any other entity unless otherwise provided by law;

2. The spouse of the deceased or any person related within two (2) degrees of consanguinity to the deceased, unless the district attorney or law enforcement agency making a criminal investigation objects to the release of documents to any family member. District attorneys and law enforcement agencies shall be prohibited from objecting to the release of the full and complete autopsy report to the family if the decedent was in state custody, in custody of law enforcement or is deceased due to lethal action of a law enforcement officer; and

3. Any insurance company conducting an insurer's investigation of any insurance claim arising from the death of the individual upon whom the autopsy was performed.

D. The full and complete report of the facts developed by the autopsy, together with the findings of the person making the report, shall be withheld from public inspection and copying for ten (10) business days following the date the report is generated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, except as provided for in subsection C of this section.

E. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner shall produce a summary report of investigation by the medical examiner at the same time the full and complete report of the facts developed by the autopsy, together with the findings of the person making the report, is released to the parties listed in subsection C of this section. The summary report of investigation shall be made available for public inspection and copying without delay. Any person may obtain a copy of the summary report of investigation in the most expedient manner available or as requested by the records requester.

F. The summary report of investigation shall include, but not be limited to the following information, if known:

1. Decedent name, age, birth date, race, sex, home address, examiner notified by name and title and including date and time, location where decedent was injured or became ill, including name of facility, address, city, county, type of premises, date and time; location of death including name of facility, city, county, type of premises, date and time, and location body was viewed by medical examiner including address, city, county, type of premises and date and time;

2. If the death was a motor vehicle accident, whether the decedent was the driver, passenger or pedestrian, and the type of vehicle involved in the accident;

3. A description of the body, including but not limited to the external physical examination, rigor, livor, external observations including hair, eye color, body length and weight, and other external observations, as well as the presence and location of blood; and

4. The probable cause of death, other significant conditions contributing to the death but not resulting in the underlying cause given, manner of death, case disposition, case number, and name and contact information of the medical examiner performing the autopsy, including a signature and certification statement that the facts contained in the report are true and correct to the best of their knowledge and the date the report was signed and generated.

G. At the conclusion of the ten (10) business-day-period, the full and complete report shall be made available as a public record except when a district attorney or law enforcement agency with authority to make a criminal investigation in connection with the death declares that the full and complete report contains information that would materially compromise an ongoing criminal investigation. Such declaration shall be in writing to the Office of the Medical Examiner and be an open record available from the Office of Medical Examiner.

1. Upon such declaration, the district attorney or law enforcement agency shall request from the appropriate district court a hearing for an extension of time during which the full and complete autopsy report, not including information in the summary report, may be withheld.

2. When a request for an extension of time has been filed with the court, the full and complete autopsy report in question may be withheld until the court has issued a ruling on the requested extension of time to release the autopsy report. Such requests for an extension of time during which the autopsy may be withheld shall be made on the grounds that release of the full and complete autopsy report will materially compromise an ongoing criminal investigation.

3. Courts considering such requests shall conduct a hearing and consider whether the interests of the public outweigh the interests asserted by the district attorney or law enforcement agency.

4. If an extension of time is granted by the court, the initial extension shall be ordered by the court for a period of six (6) months. Subsequent extensions shall only be ordered after a hearing by the court for an additional one year and cumulative time extensions shall not exceed more than four (4) years and six (6) months; provided, under no circumstance shall an extension of time be granted by the court if the deceased person was in state custody, in custody of law enforcement or was deceased due to lethal action of a law enforcement officer.

5. In the event that six (6) months have expired from the date of the initial release of the autopsy report without any person being criminally charged in the case in question and release of the autopsy or portions of the autopsy have been denied on the grounds of materially compromising a criminal investigation, an appeal of such denial may be made to the appropriate district court. Courts considering appeals for temporarily withholding an autopsy report shall conduct a hearing and consider whether the interests of the public outweigh the interests asserted by the district attorney or law enforcement agency. In response to such appeals, the district court shall order that the autopsy report be made available for public inspection and copying with no redaction, or shall order an extension of time during which the autopsy report may be withheld under the provisions of this section.

6. Any court order obtained pursuant to this subsection shall be served upon the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner by the party requesting or granted the extension by the court.

H. An order granting an extension of time shall be applicable to the autopsy report for the duration of the extension; provided, each subsequent time extension shall only be ordered by the district court for an additional twelve-month period of time or less and cumulative time extensions shall not exceed four (4) years and six (6) months; provided, charges being filed against a person in the case in question or an autopsy report being entered into evidence as part of a criminal prosecution nullifies any granted extension of

time.

I. The opportunities to withhold an autopsy report or portions of an autopsy report provided in this section shall expire in totality four (4) years and six (6) months after the date the autopsy report was generated, at which time the autopsy report previously withheld on the grounds provided for in this section shall be made available for public inspection and copying.

J. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a district attorney or law enforcement agency with authority to make a criminal investigation in connection with the death from immediately releasing portions of information contained in the full and complete autopsy report for the purposes of assisting with the criminal investigation or apprehension of any person involved in a criminal act that resulted in the death of another person.

K. After ten (10) business days from the release of the full and complete report, nothing in this section shall prohibit the spouse of the deceased or any person related within two (2) degrees of consanguinity to the deceased who has received a copy of the full and complete autopsy report from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner from authorizing the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner's office to release the full and complete autopsy report to any other person subject to approval by the court.

SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 63 O.S. 2011, Section 1-329.1, is amended to read as follows:

Section 1-329.1. Until a permit for disposal has been issued in accordance with this section, no dead human body whose death occurred within the State of Oklahoma shall be cremated, buried at sea, or made unavailable for further pathologic study by other recognized means of destruction or dissolution of such remains.

When the person legally responsible for disposition of a dead human body, whose death occurred or was pronounced within this state, desires that the body be cremated, buried at sea, or made unavailable for further pathologic study by other recognized means of destruction or dissolution of such remains, that person shall complete an application-permit form for such procedure provided by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The Office of the Chief

Medical Examiner, in accordance with Section 948.1 of this title, shall charge a fee ~~of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00)~~ for each cremation permit issued. The Medical Examiner shall be notified, as required in Section 938 of this title. He or she shall perform the required investigation and shall issue a valid death certificate as required by Section 947 of this title and execute the permit in accordance with rules established by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. In order to be valid, each permit must contain an individual number assigned to the particular permit by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. A copy of the application-permit form and the original death certificate shall be filed with the State Registrar. The original application-permit form shall be filed by the funeral director with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Such filing shall occur or be postmarked within forty-eight (48) hours of the death.

If death occurred or was pronounced outside the geographic limits of the State of Oklahoma and the body is brought into this state for such disposal, a transit permit or a permit for removal, issued in accordance with the laws and regulations in force where the death occurred shall authorize the transportation of the body into or through this state and shall be accepted in lieu of a certificate of death as required above. A valid permit issued for disposal of such body in accordance with the laws in the jurisdiction where the body died or death was pronounced shall be authority for cremation or burial at sea or to make the body otherwise unavailable for further pathologic study by other recognized means of destruction or dissolution of such remains.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2017.

Passed the Senate the 25th day of May, 2017.

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Presiding Officer of the Senate

Passed the House of Representatives the 25th day of May, 2017.

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Presiding Officer of the House  
of Representatives

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Received by the Office of the Governor this \_\_\_\_\_

day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ M.

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by the Governor of the State of Oklahoma this \_\_\_\_\_

day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ M.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Governor of the State of Oklahoma

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Received by the Office of the Secretary of State this \_\_\_\_\_

day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ M.

By: \_\_\_\_\_