

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1068**

Introduced by

Human Services Committee

(At the request of the Department of Health and Human Services)

1 A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact sections 23-01-05.5 and 44-04-18.18 of the North  
2 Dakota Century Code, relating to autopsy reports, working papers, and photographs.

3 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

4 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 23-01-05.5 of the North Dakota Century Code is  
5 amended and reenacted as follows:

6 **23-01-05.5. Autopsy reports, working papers, and images - Confidential - Exceptions.**

7 1. As used in this section:

- 8 a. "Autopsy report" means the report of the forensic examiner or the examiner's  
9 designee on the post-mortem examination of a deceased individual to determine  
10 the cause and manner of death, including any written analysis, diagram,  
11 photograph, or toxicological test results.
- 12 b. "Notes" means the notes or dictations taken or created by the state forensic  
13 examiner or the examiner's designee during the course of an investigation into  
14 the cause and manner of death of a decedent.
- 15 c. "Report of death" means the official findings on the cause of death and manner of  
16 death issued by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, county  
17 coroner, or pathologist performing an autopsy ordered by a county coroner or by  
18 the state forensic examiner and which is the face page of the autopsy report  
19 identifying the decedent and stating the cause of death and manner of death.
- 20 d. "Working papers" means the medical records, investigatory records, law  
21 enforcement records, and other records or materials collected or compiled by the  
22 state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee and the notes or dictations  
23 created by the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee during the  
24 course of an investigation into the cause and manner of death of a decedent. The

1 term does not include autopsy photographs or other visual images or video or  
2 audio recordings of an autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the  
3 examiner's designee, prosecutor, criminal justice agency, any employee or agent  
4 of a criminal justice agency, or any other individual, or other photographs or  
5 visual images of the decedent which may have been taken by law enforcement or  
6 other individuals.

7 2. ~~An autopsy report and any working papers and notes relating to an autopsy report are~~  
8 ~~confidential and may be disclosed only as permitted by this section.~~ The report of  
9 death is subject to disclosure as follows:

- 10 a. ~~The~~ if requested before the report of death becomes a public record, the next of  
11 kin or authorized representative requesting the report of death is responsible for  
12 providing to the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee satisfactory  
13 proof of relationship to the deceased and contact information for notification of  
14 the report of death.
- 15 b. When in receipt of the information in subdivision a, the state forensic examiner,  
16 examiner's designee, county coroner, or pathologist who performed the autopsy  
17 shall make a good faith effort to immediately notify the decedent's next of kin or  
18 authorized representative of the availability of the report of death. The notification  
19 or attempts to notify the next of kin or authorized representative must be  
20 recorded and must precede any public disclosure of the report of death.
- 21 c. The report of death becomes a public record eight days after the report of death  
22 is finalized.

23 3. ~~Subject to the limitations on the disclosure of an autopsy photograph or other visual~~  
24 ~~image or video or audio recording of an autopsy required under section 44-04-18.18,~~  
25 ~~any working~~ Working papers and notes relating to a final autopsy report may be  
26 disclosed pursuant to a court order in accordance with section 44-04-18.11 and as  
27 otherwise expressly provided by law subsection 5.

28 4. An autopsy report is confidential and may be disclosed in accordance with section  
29 44-04-18.11 and subsections 5 and 6.

30 5. The state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee shall disclose a copy of the  
31 autopsy report and working papers to:

- 1           a. ~~To any~~A county coroner, including a coroner in any state or Canadian province,  
2           with jurisdiction over the death, and the coroner may use or disclose these  
3           records for purposes of an investigation, inquest, or prosecution.
- 4           b. ~~To any state's attorney~~A prosecutor or criminal justice agency, as defined by  
5           section 44-04-18.7, including a prosecutor or criminal justice agency of the  
6           United States, any state, or any Canadian province, with jurisdiction over an  
7           investigation of the death and the ~~state's attorney~~prosecutor or criminal justice  
8           agency may use or disclose these records for the purposes of an investigation or  
9           prosecution.
- 10          c. ~~To workforce~~Workforce safety and insurance if the death is related to the  
11          decedent's work, and to any other workers' compensation or other similar  
12          program, established by law, that provides benefits for work-related injuries or  
13          illness without regard to fault if there is no criminal investigation.
- 14          d. ~~To the~~The child fatality review panel if there is no active criminal investigation.
- 15          e. The suicide fatality review commission if there is no active criminal investigation.
- 16          f. In accordance with a court order.
- 17    5.6. ~~The~~If there is no active criminal investigation, the state forensic examiner or the  
18          examiner's designee upon request shall disclose a copy of the autopsy report to:
- 19          a. The decedent's personal representative ~~and to the~~.
- 20          b. The decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon  
21          proof of the relationship, ~~if there is no active criminal investigation.~~
- 22          ~~b.c.~~ A physician or hospital ~~who~~that treated the ~~deceased~~decedent immediately prior  
23          to ~~before~~ death if there is no active criminal investigation.
- 24          ~~e.d.~~ An insurance company upon proof ~~that~~ the decedent's life was covered by a  
25          policy issued by the company ~~if there is no active criminal investigation.~~
- 26          ~~d.e.~~ The food and drug administration, the national transportation safety board, the  
27          occupational health and safety administration, and any other federal or state  
28          agency with authority to obtain an autopsy report to investigate a death resulting  
29          from the decedent's type of injury or illness.
- 30          ~~e.f.~~ A professional or research organization collecting data to initiate or advance  
31          death investigation standards, after the identifiers necessary to create a limited

1 data set under title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, part 164, section 514,  
2 subsection e have been removed from the report.

3 g. The maternal mortality review committee.

4 6-7. An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio recording of an  
5 autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, prosecutor,  
6 criminal justice agency, any employee or agent of a criminal justice agency, or any  
7 other individual is confidential and may be disclosed in accordance with section  
8 44-04-18.11 and as provided in this subsection:

9 a. The state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee shall, upon request,  
10 disclose a copy of autopsy photographs or other visual images or video or audio  
11 recordings of an autopsy to any prosecutor or criminal justice agency as defined  
12 by section 44-04-18.7, including a prosecutor or criminal justice agency of the  
13 United States, any state, or any Canadian province, with jurisdiction over an  
14 investigation of the death and the prosecutor or criminal justice agency may use  
15 or disclose these records for the purposes of an investigation or prosecution.

16 b. After redacting all information identifying the decedent, including name, address,  
17 and social security number, and anonymizing facial recognition, a medical  
18 examiner, coroner, or physician may use an autopsy photograph, image, or video  
19 or audio recording for:

- 20 (1) Medical or scientific teaching or training purposes;  
21 (2) Teaching or training of law enforcement personnel;  
22 (3) Teaching or training of attorneys or others with a bona fide professional  
23 need to use or understand forensic science;  
24 (4) Conferring with medical or scientific experts;  
25 (5) Publication in a scientific or medical journal or textbook; or  
26 (6) Teaching or training of coroner personnel or other licensed or certified  
27 medical professionals.

28 c. The decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon  
29 proof of the relationship, may view an autopsy photograph, image, or recording in  
30 the business office of a medical examiner, coroner, or physician who has

- 1                   possession of the materials, if there is not an active criminal investigation or  
2                   prosecution.
- 3           d. Upon receipt by the requestor of a court order requiring disclosure and a court-  
4                   issued protective order in accordance with section 44-04-18.11, the state forensic  
5                   examiner or the examiner's designee shall disclose a copy of autopsy  
6                   photographs or other visual images or video or audio recordings of an autopsy to  
7                   the decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon proof  
8                   of the relationship.
- 9           8. Other photographs or visual images of the decedent which may have been taken by  
10                   law enforcement or other persons are confidential.
- 11           9. Notes are confidential records.
- 12           10. The forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, any county coroner or county  
13                   medical coroner, and any public employee who, in good faith, discloses autopsy  
14                   findings, an autopsy report, working papers, autopsy photograph, notes, other  
15                   photographs or visual images of a decedent, or a video or audio recording of an  
16                   autopsy, or other information relating to an autopsy report or cause of death to a  
17                   person who the public official or employee reasonably believes is entitled to that  
18                   information under this section is immune from any liability, civil or criminal, for making  
19                   that disclosure. For the purposes of any proceeding, the good faith of any public  
20                   employee who makes a disclosure under this section is presumed.

21           **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-18.18 of the North Dakota Century Code is  
22                   amended and reenacted as follows:

23           **44-04-18.18. Autopsy images - Confidential - Exceptions.**

- 24           1. ~~An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio recording of an~~  
25                   ~~autopsy is confidential. However, a criminal justice agency may use or disclose these~~  
26                   ~~materials for purposes of an investigation or prosecution.~~
- 27           2. a. ~~After redacting all information identifying the decedent, including name, address,~~  
28                   ~~and social security number, and anonymizing facial recognition, a medical~~  
29                   ~~examiner, coroner, or physician may use an autopsy photograph, image, or~~  
30                   ~~recording for:~~
- 31                   (1) ~~Medical or scientific teaching or training purposes;~~

- 1                   (2) Teaching or training of law enforcement personnel;
- 2                   (3) Teaching or training of attorneys or others with a bona fide professional
- 3                   need to use or understand forensic science;
- 4                   (4) Conferring with medical or scientific experts;
- 5                   (5) Publication in a scientific or medical journal or textbook; or
- 6                   (6) Teaching or training of coroner personnel or other licensed or certified
- 7                   medical professionals.
- 8                   b. A medical examiner, coroner, or physician who has in good faith complied with
- 9                   this subsection is not subject to any penalty or liability for using an autopsy
- 10                  photograph, image, or recording.
- 11                  3. The decedent's spouse, child, parent, or sibling, upon proof of the relationship, may
- 12                  view an autopsy photograph, image, or recording in the business office of a medical
- 13                  examiner, coroner, or physician who has possession of the materials, if there is not an
- 14                  active criminal investigation or prosecution.
- 15                  4. Disclosure of an autopsy photograph, image, or recording may be obtained under
- 16                  ~~section 44-04-18.11~~An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio
- 17                  recording of an autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's
- 18                  designee, prosecutor, criminal justice agency, any employee or agent of the criminal
- 19                  justice agency, or any other individual is confidential and may be disclosed in
- 20                  accordance with section 23-01-05.5.