

**Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota  
In Regular Session Commencing Tuesday, January 7, 2025**

HOUSE BILL NO. 1068  
(Human Services Committee)  
(At the request of the Department of Health and Human Services)

AN ACT to amend and reenact sections 23-01-05.5, 43-10-10.1, and 44-04-18.18 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to autopsy reports, working papers, funeral practice exceptions, and photographs.

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

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

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

1. As used in this section:
  - a. "Autopsy report" means the report of the forensic examiner or the examiner's designee on the post-mortem examination of a deceased individual to determine the cause and manner of death, including any written analysis, diagram, photograph, or toxicological test results.
  - b. "Notes" means the notes or dictations taken or created by the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee during the course of an investigation into the cause and manner of death of a decedent.
  - c. "Report of death" means the official findings on the cause of death and manner of death issued by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, county coroner, or pathologist performing an autopsy ordered by a county coroner or by the state forensic examiner and which is the face page of the autopsy report identifying the decedent and stating the cause of death and manner of death.
  - d. "Working papers" means the medical records, investigatory records, law enforcement records, and other records or materials collected or compiled by the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee and the notes or dictations created by the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee during the course of an investigation into the cause and manner of death of a decedent. The term does not include autopsy photographs or other visual images or video or audio recordings of an autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, prosecutor, criminal justice agency, any employee or agent of a criminal justice agency, or any other individual, or other photographs or visual images of the decedent which may have been taken by law enforcement or other individuals.
2. ~~An autopsy report and any working papers and notes relating to an autopsy report are confidential and may be disclosed only as permitted by this section. The report of death is subject to disclosure as follows:~~
  - a. ~~The~~ requested before the report of death becomes a public record, the next of kin or authorized representative requesting the report of death is responsible for providing to the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee satisfactory proof of relationship to the deceased and contact information for notification of the report of death.
  - b. When in receipt of the information in subdivision a, the state forensic examiner, examiner's designee, county coroner, or pathologist who performed the autopsy shall

make a good faith effort to immediately notify the decedent's next of kin or authorized representative of the availability of the report of death. The notification or attempts to notify the next of kin or authorized representative must be recorded and must precede any public disclosure of the report of death.

- c. The report of death becomes a public record eight days after the report of death is finalized.
3. ~~Subject to the limitations on the disclosure of an autopsy photograph or other visual image or video or audio recording of an autopsy required under section 44-04-18.18, any~~ Working papers and notes relating to a final autopsy report may be disclosed pursuant to a court order in accordance with section 44-04-18.11 and as otherwise expressly provided by law subsection 5.
4. An autopsy report is confidential and may be disclosed in accordance with section 44-04-18.11 and subsections 5 and 6.
5. The state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee shall disclose a copy of the autopsy report and working papers to:
  - a. ~~To any~~ A county coroner, including a coroner in any state or Canadian province, with jurisdiction over the death, and the coroner may use or disclose these records for purposes of an investigation, inquest, or prosecution.
  - b. ~~To any state's attorney~~ A prosecutor or criminal justice agency, as defined by section 44-04-18.7, including a prosecutor or criminal justice agency of the United States, any state, or any Canadian province, with jurisdiction over an investigation of the death and the ~~state's attorney~~ prosecutor or criminal justice agency may use or disclose these records for the purposes of an investigation or prosecution.
  - c. ~~To workforce~~ Workforce safety and insurance if the death is related to the decedent's work, and to any other workers' compensation or other similar program, established by law, that provides benefits for work-related injuries or illness without regard to fault if there is no criminal investigation.
  - d. ~~To the~~ The child fatality review panel if there is no active criminal investigation.
  - e. The suicide fatality review commission if there is no active criminal investigation.
  - f. In accordance with a court order.
- 5.6. If there is no active criminal investigation, the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee upon request shall disclose a copy of the autopsy report to:
  - a. The decedent's personal representative ~~and to the~~.
  - b. The decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon proof of the relationship, ~~if there is no active criminal investigation.~~
  - ~~b.c.~~ A physician or hospital ~~who~~ that treated the ~~deceased~~ decedent immediately ~~prior to~~ before death ~~if there is no active criminal investigation.~~
  - ~~e.d.~~ An insurance company upon proof ~~that~~ the decedent's life was covered by a policy issued by the company ~~if there is no active criminal investigation.~~
  - ~~d.e.~~ The food and drug administration, the national transportation safety board, the occupational health and safety administration, and any other federal or state agency with authority to obtain an autopsy report to investigate a death resulting from the decedent's type of injury or illness.

- e.f. A professional or research organization collecting data to initiate or advance death investigation standards, after the identifiers necessary to create a limited data set under title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, part 164, section 514, subsection e have been removed from the report.
  - g. The maternal mortality review committee.
- 6-7. An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio recording of an autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, prosecutor, criminal justice agency, any employee or agent of a criminal justice agency, or any other individual is confidential and may be disclosed in accordance with section 44-04-18.11 and as provided in this subsection:
- a. The state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee shall, upon request, disclose a copy of autopsy photographs or other visual images or video or audio recordings of an autopsy to any prosecutor or criminal justice agency as defined by section 44-04-18.7, including a prosecutor or criminal justice agency of the United States, any state, or any Canadian province, with jurisdiction over an investigation of the death and the prosecutor or criminal justice agency may use or disclose these records for the purposes of an investigation or prosecution.
  - b. After redacting all information identifying the decedent, including name, address, and social security number, and anonymizing facial recognition, a medical examiner, coroner, or physician may use an autopsy photograph, image, or video or audio recording for:
    - (1) Medical or scientific teaching or training purposes;
    - (2) Teaching or training of law enforcement personnel;
    - (3) Teaching or training of attorneys or others with a bona fide professional need to use or understand forensic science;
    - (4) Conferring with medical or scientific experts;
    - (5) Publication in a scientific or medical journal or textbook; or
    - (6) Teaching or training of coroner personnel or other licensed or certified medical professionals.
  - c. The decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon proof of the relationship, may view an autopsy photograph, image, or recording in the business office of a medical examiner, coroner, or physician who has possession of the materials, if there is not an active criminal investigation or prosecution.
  - d. Upon receipt by the requestor of a court order requiring disclosure and a court-issued protective order in accordance with section 44-04-18.11, the state forensic examiner or the examiner's designee shall disclose a copy of autopsy photographs or other visual images or video or audio recordings of an autopsy to the decedent's spouse, child eighteen years of age or older, or parent, upon proof of the relationship.
8. Other photographs or visual images of the decedent in the possession of the forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, or any county coroner which may have been taken by law enforcement or other persons are confidential.
9. Notes are confidential records.
10. The forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, any county coroner or county medical coroner, and any public employee who, in good faith, discloses autopsy findings, an autopsy report, working papers, autopsy photograph, notes, other photographs or visual images of a

decedent, or a video or audio recording of an autopsy, or other information relating to an autopsy report or cause of death to a person who the public official or employee reasonably believes is entitled to that information under this section is immune from any liability, civil or criminal, for making that disclosure. For the purposes of any proceeding, the good faith of any public employee who makes a disclosure under this section is presumed.

**SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 43-10-10.1 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

**43-10-10.1. Funeral practice - Exceptions.**

1. Nothing in this chapter may be construed to prevent a person from doing work within the standards and ethics of that person's profession and calling, provided that the person does not represent to the public that the person is engaging in the practice of funeral service.
2. Nothing in this chapter may be construed to prevent embalming by commissioned medical officers in the armed forces of the United States or under the United States public health service while on active duty in a respective service.
3. This chapter does not prevent the transportation of a dead human body in accordance with other applicable state and federal laws.
4. This chapter does not prohibit ambulance or other emergency transportation of a dead human body.
5. This chapter does not prohibit members of the clergy from performing funeral and gravesite or memorial services.
6. This chapter does not prohibit unlicensed individuals, employed by a funeral establishment, from performing gravesite or memorial services for cremated remains.
7. This chapter does not prohibit individuals licensed in other states, as embalmers or funeral directors, from assisting funeral practitioners.
- 7.8. This chapter does not prohibit individuals employed by a funeral establishment from performing nonprofessional tasks or activities that do not require independent, professional judgment under the supervision of an individual licensed to practice funeral service.

**SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.** Section 44-04-18.18 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows:

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

1. ~~An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio recording of an autopsy is confidential. However, a criminal justice agency may use or disclose these materials for purposes of an investigation or prosecution.~~
2. a. ~~After redacting all information identifying the decedent, including name, address, and social security number, and anonymizing facial recognition, a medical examiner, coroner, or physician may use an autopsy photograph, image, or recording for:~~
  - (1) ~~Medical or scientific teaching or training purposes;~~
  - (2) ~~Teaching or training of law enforcement personnel;~~
  - (3) ~~Teaching or training of attorneys or others with a bona fide professional need to use or understand forensic science;~~
  - (4) ~~Conferring with medical or scientific experts;~~

- (5) ~~Publication in a scientific or medical journal or textbook; or~~
  - (6) ~~Teaching or training of coroner personnel or other licensed or certified medical professionals.~~
- b. ~~A medical examiner, coroner, or physician who has in good faith complied with this subsection is not subject to any penalty or liability for using an autopsy photograph, image, or recording.~~
3. ~~The decedent's spouse, child, parent, or sibling, upon proof of the relationship, may view an autopsy photograph, image, or recording in the business office of a medical examiner, coroner, or physician who has possession of the materials, if there is not an active criminal investigation or prosecution.~~
4. ~~Disclosure of an autopsy photograph, image, or recording may be obtained under section 44-04-18.11. An autopsy photograph or other visual image or a video or audio recording of an autopsy taken by the state forensic examiner, the examiner's designee, prosecutor, criminal justice agency, any employee or agent of the criminal justice agency, or any other individual is confidential and may be disclosed in accordance with section 23-01-05.5.~~

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Speaker of the House

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President of the Senate

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Chief Clerk of the House

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Secretary of the Senate

This certifies that the within bill originated in the House of Representatives of the Sixty-ninth Legislative Assembly of North Dakota and is known on the records of that body as House Bill No. 1068.

House Vote:    Yeas 91            Nays 0            Absent 3

Senate Vote:    Yeas 44            Nays 1            Absent 2

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Chief Clerk of the House

Received by the Governor at \_\_\_\_\_ M. on \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

Approved at \_\_\_\_\_ M. on \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Governor

Filed in this office this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2025,

at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ M.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary of State