

Sixty-first
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

SENATE BILL NO.

Introduced by

Senator J. Lee

1 A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact sections 11-19.1-01, 11-19.1-03, 11-19.1-04,
2 11-19.1-06, 11-19.1-07, 11-19.1-08, 11-19.1-10, 11-19.1-11, 11-19.1-13, 11-19.1-15,
3 11-19.1-17, 11-19.1-18, 11-19.1-19, 11-19.1-20, and 23-01-05.4 of the North Dakota Century
4 Code, relating to the powers and duties of the coroner and state forensic examiner; to repeal
5 chapter 11-19 and section 11-19.1-05 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the county
6 coroner and the appointment of an assistant coroner; and to provide a penalty.

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

8 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-01 of the North Dakota Century Code is
9 amended and reenacted as follows:

10 **11-19.1-01. Definitions.** ~~The following words and phrases when As used in this~~
11 ~~chapter have the meanings ascribed to them in this section except in those instances when,~~
12 ~~unless the context clearly indicates a different meaning otherwise requires:~~

- 13 1. "Autopsy" means the inspection or dissection of a ~~dead~~ deceased human body for
14 the purpose of inquiring into the cause of death and retention of organs, tissue, or
15 fluids for diagnostic, educational, public health, or research purposes.
- 16 2. "Casualty" means death arising from accidental or unusual means.
- 17 3. "City" means a city organized under the laws of this state.
- 18 4. "Physician" includes physicians and surgeons licensed under ~~the provisions of~~
19 ~~chapter 43-17, as amended.~~
- 20 5. "~~Suspicious~~ Reportable circumstances" ~~means the existence of~~ includes one or
21 more of the following factors:
 - 22 a. ~~Self-inflicted~~ Obvious or suspected homicidal, suicidal, or accidental injury;
 - 23 b. Firearm injury;
 - 24 c. Severe, unexplained injury;

- 1 d. ~~Pedestrian driveway~~ Occupant or pedestrian motor vehicle injury;
- 2 e. An injury to a child ~~which is not witnessed by the individual responsible for the~~
3 ~~child at the time the injury occurred~~;
- 4 f. ~~Inadequate supervision~~ Fire, chemical, electrical, or radiation;
- 5 g. ~~Malnutrition or delay in seeking medical care~~ Starvation;
- 6 h. ~~Confinement~~ Unidentified or skeletonized human remains;
- 7 i. ~~Bathtub or bucket drowning~~ Drowning;
- 8 j. Suffocation, smothering, or strangulation;
- 9 k. Poisoning or illegal drug use;
- 10 l. Prior child abuse or neglect assessment concerns;
- 11 m. Open child protection service case on the victim;
- 12 n. Victim is in the custody of the department of human services, county social
13 services, ~~or the division of juvenile services~~ the department of corrections and
14 rehabilitation or other correctional facility, or law enforcement;
- 15 o. Unexplained death or death in an undetermined manner;
- 16 p. Suspected sexual assault; or
- 17 q. Any other suspicious factor.

18 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-03 of the North Dakota Century Code is
19 amended and reenacted as follows:

20 **11-19.1-03. Appointment of coroner, ~~term, assistant~~ - Term - Vacancy.** The
21 ~~coroner shall be appointed by the~~ board of county commissioners shall appoint a coroner for a
22 term of ~~two~~ five years. The board shall notify the state forensic examiner in writing of any
23 appointment under this section. If ~~such~~ the office shall become of coroner becomes vacant by
24 death, resignation, expiration of the term of office, or otherwise, or ~~when~~ if the coroner becomes
25 permanently unable to perform the duties of office, the board of county commissioners shall
26 appoint a ~~person with the qualifications as hereinafter set forth~~ qualified individual to fill ~~such~~
27 the vacancy, who shall give and take the oath of office as prescribed for coroners. If the duly
28 appointed, qualified, and acting coroner is absent temporarily from the county, ~~or when on duty~~
29 ~~with the armed services of the United States, or the state militia, or with the American red cross,~~
30 or ~~when~~ is unable to discharge the duties of office for any ~~other~~ reason, ~~such~~ the coroner may

1 appoint ~~a person~~ an individual with the qualifications of coroner to act in the coroner's absence,
2 ~~service~~, or disability, upon taking the prescribed oath for coroners.

3 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-04 of the North Dakota Century Code is
4 amended and reenacted as follows:

5 **11-19.1-04. Eligibility ~~for office.~~** ~~No person shall be eligible for the office of county~~
6 ~~coroner except a physician who has been duly licensed to practice as such in this state and~~
7 ~~who is in good standing in the profession.~~

8 1. Subject to the qualifications, training, and continuing education requirements
9 determined by the state forensic examiner, the following individuals are eligible to
10 serve as coroner:

- 11 a. A physician licensed under chapter 43-17;
12 b. An advanced practice registered nurse, registered nurse, specialty practice
13 registered nurse, or licensed practical nurse licensed under chapter 43-12.1;
14 c. A physician assistant licensed under chapter 43-17; and
15 d. Any other individual determined by the state forensic examiner to be qualified
16 to serve as coroner.

17 2. The coroner may appoint assistant or deputy coroners subject to the qualifications,
18 training, and continuing education requirements determined by the state forensic
19 examiner.

20 **SECTION 4. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-06 of the North Dakota Century Code is
21 amended and reenacted as follows:

22 **11-19.1-06. ~~Persons~~ Individuals authorized to act where no resident physician in**
23 **absence of coroner.** ~~In such those~~ counties in which no physician is residing or a coroner
24 does not reside or is not available, the duties of coroner as herein provided must be performed
25 by the sheriff, the state highway patrol, or any special agent of the bureau of criminal
26 investigation. The sheriff, the state highway patrol, or special agent shall call upon the nearest
27 ~~physician~~ coroner or deputy coroner from an adjacent county to investigate the medical cause
28 of death of all coroner cases within said county. ~~Where~~ In those situations in which, because of
29 distance or adverse conditions, a ~~physician~~ coroner is not available, the sheriff, the state
30 highway patrol, or special agent shall ~~have~~ request the state forensic examiner or the forensic
31 examiner's designee ~~called in~~ to investigate and certify as to the medical cause of death.

1 **SECTION 5. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-07 of the North Dakota Century Code is
2 amended and reenacted as follows:

3 **11-19.1-07. ~~Death to be reported to coroner by physician or persons discovering~~**
4 **~~body~~ Penalty ~~Notice to state health officer~~ Right to autopsy Reports of death - Death**
5 **of minor.**

- 6 1. Any person who discovers the ~~dead~~ deceased human body; or acquires the first
7 knowledge of the death of any ~~person~~ individual, and any physician with
8 knowledge that a ~~person~~ an individual died as a result of criminal or violent means,
9 ~~casualty, suicide, accidental death, or~~ died suddenly when in apparent good health
10 in a suspicious or unusual manner, or died as the result of any other reportable
11 circumstance, shall notify immediately ~~notify~~ the office of coroner or any law
12 enforcement officer of the known facts concerning the time, place, manner, and
13 circumstances of ~~such that~~ death, and any other information ~~which that~~ may be
14 required pursuant to this chapter. Any person who violates ~~the provisions of~~ this
15 section ~~shall be~~ is guilty of a class B misdemeanor.
- 16 2. Any person who discovers the ~~dead~~ deceased human body ~~of~~; or acquires the first
17 knowledge of the death of; any minor who has received or is eligible to receive a
18 certificate of live birth, when the minor died suddenly when in apparent good
19 health, shall notify immediately ~~notify~~ law enforcement and the office of coroner of
20 the known facts concerning the time, place, manner, and circumstances of the
21 death. The death of a minor must be reported to the department of human
22 services as provided under chapter 50-25.1. The coroner shall take custody of the
23 body and immediately notify the state's attorney of the county in which the body
24 was discovered. Within twenty-four hours of the notice of a death that occurs
25 under ~~suspicious~~ reportable circumstances, the state's attorney shall consult with a
26 law enforcement agency and the state department of health. The law enforcement
27 agency shall investigate the death and notify the state's attorney of the findings.
28 The coroner shall notify the state ~~health officer~~ forensic examiner of each such
29 death, and shall provide the state ~~health officer~~ forensic examiner the information
30 concerning the death as the state ~~health officer shall require~~ forensic examiner
31 requires. The coroner or the coroner's medical deputy shall notify the parent or

1 guardian of a child under the age of one year of the right to the performance of an
2 autopsy, at state expense, as provided by this chapter.

3 **SECTION 6. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-08 of the North Dakota Century Code is
4 amended and reenacted as follows:

5 **11-19.1-08. Records of coroner's office.** ~~It is the duty of the~~ The coroner ~~to shall~~
6 keep a full and complete ~~record and to fill in the cause of death upon the death certificate in all~~
7 ~~eases coming under the coroner's jurisdiction~~ records. All records must be kept in the office of
8 the coroner; if the coroner maintains an office as coroner, and if the coroner maintains no
9 separate office, then in the office of the recorder of the county, unless the board of county
10 commissioners designates a different official, and must be properly indexed, stating the name, if
11 known, of every deceased person, the place where the body was found, date of death, cause of
12 death, and all other available information required by this chapter. The report of the coroner
13 and the detailed findings of the autopsy, if one was performed, must be attached to the report of
14 every case. The coroner shall promptly deliver or cause to be delivered to the state's attorney
15 of the county in which a death occurred copies of all necessary records relating to every death
16 in which the coroner or state's attorney determines further investigation advisable. The sheriff
17 of the county, the police of the city, or the state highway patrolmen on duty in that county in
18 which the death occurred may be requested to furnish more information or make further
19 investigation by the coroner or the coroner's deputy. The state's attorney may obtain from the
20 office of the coroner copies of records and other information necessary for further investigation.
21 All records of the coroner shall become and remain the property of the county and are public
22 records.

23 **SECTION 7. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-10 of the North Dakota Century Code is
24 amended and reenacted as follows:

25 **11-19.1-10. ~~Dead~~ Deceased human bodies to be held pending investigation.** All
26 ~~dead~~ deceased human bodies in the custody of the coroner ~~shall~~ must be held until such time
27 as the coroner after consultation with the state's attorney, the police department of the city, the
28 state highway patrolmen on duty in that county, or the sheriff has reached a decision that it is
29 not necessary to hold the ~~dead~~ body longer to enable the coroner to decide on a diagnosis,
30 giving a reasonable and true cause of death, or that the ~~dead~~ body is no longer necessary to

1 assist any one of ~~the above named~~ those officials in their duties, ~~but no dead body shall be~~
2 ~~held longer than twelve hours from the time the coroner was notified without embalming.~~

3 **SECTION 8. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-11 of the North Dakota Century Code is
4 amended and reenacted as follows:

5 **11-19.1-11. ~~Coroner may perform autopsy~~ Autopsies - Notice of results.**

- 6 1. The coroner or the coroner's medical deputy, if the coroner deems it necessary,
7 may take custody of the ~~dead~~ deceased human body for the purpose of autopsy.
- 8 2. The autopsy must be performed by the state forensic examiner or by the state
9 forensic examiner's authorized pathologist at a facility approved by the state
10 forensic examiner.
- 11 3. When the coroner does not deem an autopsy necessary, the sheriff ~~and~~ or state's
12 attorney may direct an autopsy be performed. Upon the death of a ~~child~~ minor
13 whose cause of death is suspected by the ~~child's~~ minor's parent or guardian or the
14 coroner or the coroner's medical deputy to have been the sudden infant death
15 syndrome, the coroner or the coroner's medical deputy, after consultation with the
16 parent or guardian, shall take custody of the ~~dead~~ body and shall arrange for the
17 performance of the autopsy by ~~a qualified~~ the state forensic examiner or a
18 pathologist designated by the state forensic examiner, unless the county coroner,
19 sheriff, state's attorney, and the parent or guardian all agree that an autopsy is
20 unnecessary. The parents or guardian and the state health officer ~~shall~~ must be
21 promptly notified of the results of that autopsy.

22 **SECTION 9. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-13 of the North Dakota Century Code is
23 amended and reenacted as follows:

24 **11-19.1-13. Cause of death - Determination.** The cause of death, the manner of
25 death, and the mode in which the death occurred, ~~as delivered by the coroner and incorporated~~
26 ~~in the coroner's verdict~~, must be incorporated in the death certificate filed with the registrar of
27 vital statistics of this state. The term "sudden infant death syndrome" may be entered on the
28 death certificate as the principal cause of death only if the child is under the age of one year
29 and the death remains unexplained after a case investigation that includes a complete autopsy
30 of the infant at the state's expense, examination of the death scene, and a review of the clinical
31 history of the infant.

1 **SECTION 10. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-15 of the North Dakota Century Code is
2 amended and reenacted as follows:

3 **11-19.1-15. Notice of next of kin, disposition of personal belongings - Disposition**
4 **of body when next of kin cannot be found.** The coroner of the county ~~where in which~~ a
5 death is discovered shall take charge of the case and ~~notify~~ ensure that relatives or friends of
6 the deceased ~~person~~ individual, if known, are notified as soon as possible ~~by telephone,~~
7 ~~telegram, or otherwise,~~ giving details of the death and disposition of the deceased ~~person~~
8 individual. If the relatives or friends of the deceased are unknown, the coroner shall dispose of
9 the personal effects and body in the following manner:

10 1. After using such clothing as may be necessary in the burial of the body, the
11 remaining personal effects of the deceased ~~shall~~ must be turned over to ~~the public~~
12 ~~administrator~~ law enforcement for appropriate disposition ~~of such personal~~
13 ~~property in accordance with the laws, regulations, and policies governing the office~~
14 ~~of the public administrator.~~

15 2. The remains ~~shall~~ must be:
16 a. Disposed of in accordance with ~~the provisions of~~ section 23-06-14; or
17 b. Buried in accordance with the laws governing the burial of indigent persons
18 within this state.

19 **SECTION 11. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-17 of the North Dakota Century Code is
20 amended and reenacted as follows:

21 **11-19.1-17. Application.** ~~This~~ The requirements of this chapter ~~applies~~ apply to every
22 county in this state ~~having a population of eight thousand or more, and chapter 11-19 and~~
23 ~~section 11-10-02 are not applicable to such counties. This chapter does not apply to counties~~
24 ~~having a population of less than eight thousand and such counties are governed by chapter~~
25 ~~11-19 and section 11-10-02, except that coroners shall be appointed in these counties~~
26 ~~according to section 11-19.1-03, these counties shall pay coroner's fees to other counties under~~
27 ~~subsection 1 of section 11-19.1-16, and these counties are subject to sections 11-19.1-18~~
28 ~~through 11-19.1-20.~~

29 **SECTION 12. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-18 of the North Dakota Century Code is
30 amended and reenacted as follows:

31 **11-19.1-18. State forensic examiner - Authority - Costs.**

- 1 1. The state forensic examiner may order an autopsy and exercise all powers and
2 authority bestowed upon the office of the coroner and, at any time, may assume
3 jurisdiction over a deceased human body. Whenever requested to do so by the
4 local coroner, acting coroner, or the local state's attorney, the state forensic
5 examiner shall assume jurisdiction over a ~~dead~~ deceased human body for
6 purposes of investigating the cause of death, the manner of death, and the mode
7 in which the death occurred. ~~The state forensic examiner may exercise all powers~~
8 ~~and authority bestowed upon the office of the coroner.~~ ~~The cost of performing an~~
9 ~~autopsy, investigation, or inquiry remains with the county, except for an autopsy,~~
10 ~~investigation, or inquiry resulting from the death of a patient or resident of the state~~
11 ~~hospital or any other state residential facility or an inmate of a state penal~~
12 ~~institution.~~
13 2. Except for the cost of an autopsy performed by the state forensic examiner and for
14 the cost of an autopsy, investigation, or inquiry that results from the death of a
15 patient or resident of the state hospital or any other state residential facility or an
16 inmate of a state penal institution, all costs with respect to the autopsy, the
17 transporting of the body for autopsy, and the costs of the investigation or inquiry
18 are the responsibility of the county.

19 **SECTION 13. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-19 of the North Dakota Century Code is
20 amended and reenacted as follows:

21 **11-19.1-19. ~~State forensic examiner~~ – Required reports to state forensic examiner.**

22 ~~The~~ On the form and in the manner prescribed by the state forensic examiner, the coroner or
23 ~~any person~~ individual acting as coroner shall report to the state forensic examiner every death
24 ~~that occurs:~~

- 25 1. ~~As a result of violence or casualty;~~
26 2. ~~Suddenly when in apparent good health;~~
27 3. ~~In a suspicious or unusual manner; or~~
28 4. ~~Involving a patient or resident of the state hospital or any other state residential~~
29 ~~facility or an inmate of a state, county, or city penal institution~~ of which the coroner
30 is notified or which the coroner investigates.

1 **SECTION 14. AMENDMENT.** Section 11-19.1-20 of the North Dakota Century Code is
2 amended and reenacted as follows:

3 **11-19.1-20. State forensic examiner - Required consultation.** The coroner or any
4 ~~person~~ individual acting as a coroner shall actively consult with the state forensic examiner in
5 every death involving an inmate of a state, county, or city penal institution; death involving a
6 child under the age of one when in apparent good health; and death that the coroner or acting
7 coroner believes may have resulted from an accident, a suicide, or a homicide, under
8 suspicious circumstances, or as a result of child abuse or neglect.

9 **SECTION 15. AMENDMENT.** Section 23-01-05.4 of the North Dakota Century Code is
10 amended and reenacted as follows:

11 **23-01-05.4. Department to employ state forensic examiner - Qualifications -**
12 **Duties.** The state department of health may employ and establish the qualifications and
13 compensation of the state forensic examiner. The state forensic examiner must be a ~~licensed~~
14 physician who is board-certified or board-eligible in forensic pathology, who is licensed to
15 practice in this state, and who is in good standing in the profession. The state forensic
16 examiner shall:

- 17 1. Exercise all authority conferred upon the coroner under chapter 11-19.1 and any
18 other law;
- 19 2. Consult with local coroners on the performance of their duties as coroners;
- 20 ~~2.~~ 3. Conduct investigations into the cause of death of and perform autopsies on any
21 ~~dead~~ deceased human body whenever requested to do so by the acting local
22 county coroner or the local state's attorney;
- 23 ~~3.~~ 4. Provide training and educational materials to local county coroners, law
24 enforcement, and any other person the state forensic examiner deems necessary;
25 and
- 26 5. Maintain complete records of the cause, manner, and mode of death necessary for
27 accurate health statistics and for public health purposes; and
- 28 ~~4.~~ 6. Perform other duties assigned by the state health officer.

29 **SECTION 16. REPEAL.** Chapter 11-19 and section 11-19.1-05 of the North Dakota
30 Century Code are repealed.