Local Government Mandate Statement Kentucky Legislative Research Commission 2020 Regular Session

REVISED 1/28/2020

Part I: Measure Information

Bill Request #: 201						
Bill #: SB 66 GA						
Document ID #:						
Bill Subject/Title: AN ACT relating to the disposition of a decedent's body.						
Sponsor: Sen. Robby Mills						
Unit of Government:XCityXCountyXUrban-CountyXCharter CountyXConsolidated LocalXGovernment						
Office(s) Impacted: Coroners; law enforcement						
Requirement: <u>X</u> Mandatory Optional						
Effect on Powers & Duties: X Modifies Existing Adds New Eliminates Existing						

Part II: Bill Provisions and the Estimated Fiscal Impact Relating to Local Government

SB 66 GA prohibits a person who has been arrested or charged with "committing an offense intentionally, knowingly, wantonly, or recklessly, which resulted in the death of the decedent" from having any right to control disposition of the decedent's remains. The person may petition the court for a waiver of this disqualification.

The fiscal impact of this bill is indeterminate to moderate. Currently, if foul play is suspected, a body is held by the coroner until a medical examiner completes any autopsy; the coroner then contacts the person who has the statutory right under KRS 367.93117 to control disposition of the body. That will not change under SB 66 GA, which requires the coroner to contact the highest prioritized person by statute who would not otherwise be disqualified under the bill. If the person charged is lower in priority under KRS 367.93117, then the bill would have no impact. If the person charged has the highest priority, the coroner would skip that person and contact the next person prioritized. The bill does not

require a coroner to keep a body for a longer period of time *per se*; rather, the coroner would simply pass over the person charged and contact the next person prioritized to decide on disposition. This process could take additional time. If no such person can be found, the coroner may need to retain a decedent's body until a person petitions the court to waive the disqualification.

Delays may be more likely if the decedent has fewer connections with the community or has fewer records that might indicate the identity of relatives. There could be also be concerns about disposition within any timeframe necessitated by religious custom.

For any extra period of time required for storing human remains, the Fayette County Coroner reported the cost would be "large":

- the average body bag costs \$40;
- transportation of the remains if contracted to a funeral home averages about \$200;
- about 80% of coroners do not have a morgue cooler. The average cost for refrigeration of human remains (with a local funeral home, mortuary, or crematory that permits it) is \$38.25/day, with an establishment charge of \$88, \$90, and \$100/day. The average cost to purchase a morgue refrigerator is \$3,500. Electric charges would be additional;
- cost of training and communication between the coroner (DOCJT) and the funeral director (State Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors).

The Franklin County Coroner also reported costs with the bill, reporting that most coroners' offices in Kentucky do not have their own cold storage facility, thus would not have the equipment, staff, or ability to shelter a decedent while searching for next of kin. The cost of a storage facility would be significant. There would also be costs associated with training staff to assess each case and communicating with funeral directors, police, or attorneys. Funeral homes would need proper training and explanation to communicate with families and attorneys. There is a logistical problem in that the bill does not address the reality that criminal charges may take some period of time to evolve, very possibly after the funeral service.

For a perspective of the number of instances that might be involved, in 2017, there were 2,471 autopsies in Kentucky, of which 325 were determined to be homicides. There were 295 suicides, 1,159 accidents, 167 undetermined, 12 pending, and one with remains of no forensic significance. According to a brochure of the Kentucky Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, "the autopsy and other tests rarely delay the release of the body to the next-of-kin."

Part III: Differences to Local Government Mandate Statement from Prior Versions

Part II, above, pertains to the GA version. The GA version is the same as the bill as introduced. No amendments or substitutes were adopted when the bill passed its chamber of origin.

 Data Source(s):
 LRC staff; Fayette County Coroner; Franklin County Coroner; KRS

 367.93117; Kentucky Office of State Medical Examiner, 2017 Annual

 Report; https://justice.ky.gov/Documents/Medical%20Examiners/

 KentuckyMedicalExaminerBrochure.pdf

Preparer:	Robert Jenkins	Reviewer:	KHC	Date:	1/28/20
-----------	----------------	------------------	-----	-------	---------