

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

HB 7629 AA 47 1979

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**JOINT
STANDING
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HEARINGS**

**PUBLIC HEALTH
PART 4
1113-1495**

1979

March 1, 1979

REP. LAROSA: Thank you. Elliot Gross, Chief Medical Examiner.

ELLIOT GROSS: Representative LaRosa, Senator Smith, members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for letting me speak at this time. I'm speaking in favor of Committee Bill 7629 An Act Concerning Medical, Legal Investigations. This bill amends statutes governing operations of the Office of Medical Examiner and investigation of sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths in the state. This office has been a separate facility on the University of Connecticut Health Center grounds, is open 24-hours per day.

During fiscal year 1977, 107 assistant medical examiners conducted investigations into 6,955 deaths throughout the state. 431 autopsies were performed at the central facility in Farmington. These included 96 homicides, representing 75% of the 120 actual reported. An additional 1,025 autopsies were performed by 105 pathologists at community hospitals. The proposed legislation would result in the following changes:

- 1) a change in name to Office of Chief Medical Examiner,
- 2) designate autopsies at Office of the Chief Medical Examiner without regard to titles of persons performing them there.

Appoint in addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, medical examiners who are full time at the Office of Chief Medical Examiner sub registrars. The effects of these changes would be 1) to facilitate reporting of deaths thereby improving investigations of homicides and suspicious deaths. There is confusion in the statute as it exists where the Office of Medical Examiner could refer to any of the 107 assistant medical examiners throughout the state. Second, permit resident physicians, under supervision to perform autopsies at Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

We are currently in the process of establishing a residency program on forensic pathology at our office and one of the requirements is that residents be able to testify, and this change with the regard to the section would be important. Lastly, to facilitate funeral arrangements for bodies transported to our office, which is a convenience to funeral directors and families. In the past month there have been four hit and run motor vehicle fatalities in the state, and we feel that in the interests of justice and in the furtherance of implementing legislation passed in 1969 that such examinations be conducted at our central facility which is equipped to do that. We very much hope that the Public Health Committee will report favorably upon these technical changes.

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MR. GROSS: (continued)

There are three things with regards to that, one is the name should be Office of Chief Medical Examiner, not Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. This is consist with those agencies in other states, such as Maryland, Delaware, Rhode Island, Virginia, North Carolina, and with regards to the bill in line 142, the designation of pathologist, as specified in section 19-529 should be deleted since they do not have the authority to order a blood sample to be taken, and should not.

REP. LAROSA: 144?

MR. GROSS: 142 and 143.

REP. LAROSA: Pathologist as specified in section 19-529 should be deleted?

MR. GROSS: Right. And then on line 424...

SEN. SMITH: Excuse me, where does that deletion end?

MR. GROSS: It ends just after 19-529 -- just a pathologist as specified in section 19-529. And in line 424, the reference should be made for deputy chief, this is with regard ...

REP. LAROSA: . 424 -- for his deputy chief.

MR. GROSS: Delete his and add chief after deputy.

REP. LAROSA: O.K., that's it?

MR. GROSS: Yes sir.

REP. LAROSA: Any questions of Dr. Gross? Would you leave your testimony with the Committee, I recognize your comments because it seems that when the bill comes to just merely to change the name, but I think you've alluded to the fact that it's not only the change of name, but it's some of the specific duties that make the department more efficient, I assume, is the purpose, so that all the direction could be geared in one area so that the Chief Medical Examiner, so to speak, will know what's happening around the state.

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MR. GROSS: That's correct. It's best, sir, for our administration. We only have 24 full time people and your taking about an awful lot of debts and costs to the state.

SEN. SMITH: Just a question here. You made a reference to four hit and run in the last month and that such exams should be performed at the central facility, could you just explain to me what the situation is now and why you feel-- if you feel that an inadequate job is being done for some reason or other, or is it simply to facilitate your knowledge of the situation, what was the problem.

MR. GROSS: I would not use the term necessarily inadequate. But, actually three of the four were done on our central facility, one was done in a community hospital and in the past there have been instances in which deaths in jails, deaths involving arson, in which the autopsies were performed at the community hospitals before they were even reported to our office, and we do wish to bring those cases into the central facility. What is done on occasions is that bodies may be removed from the scene to a community hospital without, until the death is then reported, and we want to be able eventually, as we get full time people in addition to myself, we have one other associate medical examiner, to be able to go the scenes of the homicides as well, which is important in the continuity and eventually to testify in those findings, and I think that this would improve it as well as add to our ability to control the corpse. Because if a body is removed to a hospital and then subsequently we decide to bring that to Farmington, we have to pay for the costs in both instances.

SEN. SMITH: O.K. Thank you doctor.

REP. LAROSA: Thank you very much doctor. Does anyone else have any questions of Doctor Gross?

MR. GROSS: Thank you.

REP. LAROSA: The next speaker, Commissioner Frank Maloney from the Department of Children and Youth Services.

FRANK MALONEY: Good morning. Frank Maloney, Commissioner of the Department of Children and Youth Services, and I'm here this morning to speak in favor of Committee Bill 1331 An Appropriation to the Clifford Biers Clinic in New Haven.