

# Fiscal Note

State of Alaska  
2014 Legislative Session

Bill Version: SB 161  
Fiscal Note Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifier: SB161-DHSS-SMEO-02-18-14  
Title: AUTOPSIES AND DEATH CERTIFICATES  
Sponsor: OLSON  
Requester: Senate Health & Social Services Committee

Department: Department of Health and Social Services  
Appropriation: Public Health  
Allocation: State Medical Examiner  
OMB Component Number: 293

## Expenditures/Revenues

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

(Thousands of Dollars)

	FY2015 Appropriation Requested	Included in Governor's FY2015 Request	Out-Year Cost Estimates				
OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2015	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020
Personal Services							
Travel							
Services	110.0		110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0
Commodities	5.0						
Capital Outlay							
Grants & Benefits							
Miscellaneous							
<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>115.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>

## Fund Source (Operating Only)

1004 Gen Fund	115.0		110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0	110.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>115.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>	<b>110.0</b>

## Positions

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

<b>Change in Revenues</b>							
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**Estimated SUPPLEMENTAL (FY2014) cost:** 0.0 (separate supplemental appropriation required)  
(discuss reasons and fund source(s) in analysis section)

**Estimated CAPITAL (FY2015) cost:** 2,105.0 (separate capital appropriation required)  
(discuss reasons and fund source(s) in analysis section)

## ASSOCIATED REGULATIONS

Does the bill direct, or will the bill result in, regulation changes adopted by your agency? No  
If yes, by what date are the regulations to be adopted, amended or repealed?

## Why this fiscal note differs from previous version:

Not applicable, initial version.

Prepared By: Kerre L. Shelton, Director  
Division: Public Health  
Approved By: Sarah Woods, Deputy Director, Finance & Management Services  
Agency: Health & Social Services

Phone: (907)269-2042  
Date: 02/12/2014 12:00 AM  
Date: 02/18/14

## FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS

STATE OF ALASKA  
2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. SB161

### Analysis

This bill requires the State Medical Examiner's Office to provide written notice describing the duties and procedures of the State Medical Examiner's Office to the person responsible for the burial of the deceased; and to obtain a burial-transit permit before transporting the body. There is no cost associated with implementing this provision as this is the current practice of the State Medical Examiner's Office.

This bill requires the State Medical Examiner's Office to transport the deceased to a location other than the community nearest the location of death after examination if requested by the family and if the costs do not exceed that of shipping the body back to the community nearest the location of death. If the costs are higher for the alternate location and the family still requests it, the family would be responsible for paying the difference in the cost. There would be no additional cost associated with implementing this provision as this is the current practice of the State Medical Examiner's Office. The average cost to transport a body to the Medical Examiner's Office and back is approximately \$700.

The bill requires the State Medical Examiner's Office to perform any embalming required by law or by a policy of the transporting entity; provide the necessary cosmetology if the deceased were disfigured by the post mortem examination. Currently there are no laws requiring embalming for transport within Alaska and no transporting entities have policies requiring embalming for transport within Alaska. Therefore, the fiscal impact is zero under current circumstances. However, if a transporting entity did choose to develop such a policy, under this bill the state would be required to pay for the embalming. The State Medical Examiner's Office would have to contract for this service with a funeral home; the current rate is approximately \$1,000 per body. The state currently ships approximately 400 bodies per year back to communities within the state, therefore the total fiscal impact could be up to \$400,000 per year.

The bill requires the State Medical Examiner's Office to designate a location for conducting a post mortem examination that is in the community closest to where the death occurred if a facility with adequate technology and personnel is available at the location to enable the state medical examiner to direct a remote examination. Fairbanks is the only other location in the state, aside from the State Medical Examiner's Office in Anchorage, that is currently equipped to perform forensic examinations. Neither the State Medical Examiner's Office nor the Fairbanks location currently have telemedicine/video conferencing equipment. The one-time cost to purchase and install the necessary technology at the Medical Examiner's Office is approximately \$5,000.

There are only certain cases that could be done remotely – accidents and possible natural causes for unattended deaths. All presumed suicides and homicides would still be sent to the Medical Examiner. Those that were remotely examined and found to possibly be homicide or suicide would need to be sent to the Medical Examiner anyway. It would not be appropriate for a physician who is not a fully trained forensic pathologist to handle the full autopsy cases. These remote exams would mostly just be external exams or very minimal internal work. The Medical Examiner's Office ships about 400 cases each year to a location other than the community nearest the location of death. Of those, 40 were accidental or presumed natural causes that could have been done remotely. The remainder, if they had been done remotely, would still have had to come in to the Medical Examiner's Office for additional testing and exam.

Any site selected to perform remote forensic examinations via video conferencing would be required to maintain appropriate autopsy equipment and video conferencing equipment. The bill is unclear as to the responsibility for purchasing and maintaining the autopsy equipment. We interpret this bill to mean that the state, not the local jurisdiction would bear the costs of procuring and maintaining the equipment. The cost to outfit an exam room in an alternate location is approximately \$300,000 per site. If this was implemented in 7 new hub cities (Barrow, Bethel, Dillingham, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kotzebue, and Nome) the one-time cost is approximately \$2.1 million and \$50,000 combined annually for maintenance. Fairbanks would only need to purchase and install the necessary technology at a cost of \$5,000.  
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## FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS

STATE OF ALASKA  
2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. SB161

### Analysis Continued

The state would also incur the cost of procuring necessary video conferencing equipment for the state office, paying physician fees for the rural physician performing the exam, paying for training for the physician, paying any required facility fees, transporting the body to the facility and back to the family, and possibly transporting the body to Anchorage and back if it was determined to require additional examination. The cost to contract with the physician, facility, and radiology services at the location is estimated at \$1,500 per case. Assuming 40 cases per year, the annual contractual costs would be approximately \$60,000.

If a physician were performing these duties on behalf of the state it is unknown who would be liable if the state was ever questioned about the autopsy results. It is also unknown if the state would be responsible for providing liability coverage in these cases. Costs would be incurred in equipment and contractual services. Costs for incurring additional liability are indeterminate.

If the head, face, neck, or hands of the deceased are disfigured by the post mortem examination the department would be responsible for the cost of providing the cosmetology necessary to make the deceased presentable. The State Medical Examiner's Office currently follows this policy; however they contract with funeral homes to provide this service. There are no funeral homes located in rural Alaska and it is unknown who, if anyone, could alternatively provide this service or the cost of providing this service. There would be an additional indeterminate cost for providing cosmetology services.

Additionally, the Medical Examiner's Office is required to provide temperature and other controls to maintain the body of the deceased when transporting the deceased. This would require an additional indeterminate cost.

This bill requires the Bureau of Vital Statistics to designate a person of the deceased's community to complete the death certificate if there was no available funeral director or funeral home. This could be a difficult and time-consuming task for Bureau employees but it could be managed with existing resources by reallocating staff from other tasks. This would likely mean increased wait times for all services, not just death certificates.