

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

# HOUSE BILL

No. 1664 Session of  
1997

INTRODUCED BY TRICH, OLIVER, DeLUCA, STABACK, CASORIO, BELARDI,  
LAUGHLIN, COLAIZZO, MELIO, TRELLO, HALUSKA, JOSEPHS,  
TANGRETTI, C. WILLIAMS, MARKOSEK, EACHUS AND FAIRCHILD,  
JUNE 16, 1997

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT, JUNE 16, 1997

AN ACT

1 Amending the act of August 9, 1955 (P.L.323, No.130), entitled  
2 "An act relating to counties of the third, fourth, fifth,  
3 sixth, seventh and eighth classes; amending, revising,  
4 consolidating and changing the laws relating thereto,"  
5 further providing for coroner's investigations and inquests.

6 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
7 hereby enacts as follows:

8 Section 1. Section 1237(a) of the act of August 9, 1955  
9 (P.L.323, No.130), known as The County Code, amended November  
10 29, 1990 (P.L.602, No.152), is amended and the section is  
11 amended by adding a paragraph to read:

12 Section 1237. Coroner's Investigations.--(a) The coroner  
13 having a view of the body shall investigate the facts and  
14 circumstances concerning deaths which appear to have happened  
15 within the county, regardless where the cause thereof may have  
16 occurred, for the purpose of determining whether or not an  
17 autopsy should be conducted or an inquest thereof should be had,  
18 in the following cases:

1 (1) sudden deaths not caused by readily recognizable  
2 disease, or wherein the cause of death cannot be properly  
3 certified by a physician on the basis of prior (recent) medical  
4 attendance;

5 (2) deaths occurring under suspicious circumstances,  
6 including those where alcohol, drugs or other toxic substances  
7 may have had a direct bearing on the outcome;

8 (3) deaths occurring as a result of violence or trauma,  
9 whether apparently homicidal, suicidal or accidental (including,  
10 but not limited to, those due to mechanical, thermal, chemical,  
11 electrical or radiational injury, drowning, cave-ins and  
12 subsidences);

13 (4) any death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug  
14 overdose or reaction to drugs or medication or medical treatment  
15 was a primary or secondary, direct or indirect, contributory,  
16 aggravating or precipitating cause of death;

17 (5) operative and peri-operative deaths in which the death  
18 is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease;

19 (6) any death wherein the body is unidentified or unclaimed;

20 (7) deaths known or suspected as due to contagious disease  
21 and constituting a public hazard;

22 (8) deaths occurring in prison or a penal institution or  
23 while in the custody of the police;

24 (9) deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated,  
25 buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be thereafter  
26 unavailable for examination;

27 (10) sudden infant death syndrome; [and]

28 (11) stillbirths[.]; and

29 (12) deaths occurring in a State mental institution or a  
30 private institution as defined in section 1051 of the act of

1 June 13, 1967 (P.L.31, No.21), known as the "Public Welfare  
2 Code."

3 \* \* \*

4 Section 2. Section 1238 of the act, amended November 29,  
5 1990 (P.L.602, No.152), is amended by adding a subsection to  
6 read:

7 Section 1238. Autopsy; Inquest; Records.--\* \* \*

8 (b.1) After completion of the investigation of a death  
9 occurring in a State mental institution or a private institution  
10 as defined in section 1051 of the act of June 13, 1967 (P.L.31,  
11 No.21), known as the "Public Welfare Code," the coroner shall  
12 conduct an inquest upon a view of the body, as provided by law.  
13 At the inquest, the coroner's duty shall be to ascertain the  
14 cause of death, to determine whether any person other than the  
15 deceased was criminally responsible therefor by act or neglect,  
16 and if so, the identity of the person, and to examine any  
17 further evidence and witnesses regarding the cause of death.

18 \* \* \*

19 Section 3. This act shall take effect in 60 days.