



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HARRISBURG

THE GOVERNOR

November 3, 2020

TO THE HONORABLE SENATE OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 15 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, I am returning herewith, without my approval, Senate Bill 1164, Printer's Number 2006.

This legislation will add additional reporting requirements and cause delays in the reporting of public health information, which would jeopardize public safety. Currently, medical professionals are required to certify all natural deaths unless circumstances justify a referral to a coroner or medical examiner. Specifically, it is the responsibility of an attending physician who treated the last known illness of the decedent to certify a death, unless specified circumstances justify a referral. This bill changes this structure and adds an additional layer of reporting by health care facilities, nursing facilities, personal care homes, and physicians. Under this legislation, the requirement for coroners to investigate the facts and circumstances of various types of death is broadened to include the requirement for coroners to investigate the facts and circumstances of every death suspected to be due to a contagious disease, including a disease constituting a health disaster emergency or pandemic. Given the substantial increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths, this bill will delay the reporting and the access to public health information needed to make timely public health and safety decisions, as well as the issuances of death certificates.

In addition, this bill grants electronic access to various databases, which contain individually identifiable health information. Providing access to this information does not assist in determining whether an autopsy or inquest should be performed, but instead, risks the release of highly sensitive personal information without the protections guaranteed by the Vital Statistics Law.

For the reasons set forth above, I must withhold my signature from Senate Bill 1164, Printer's Number 2006.

Sincerely,


TOM WOLF
Governor