

HB 4082 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Management

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Meeting Dates: 2/1, 2/3, 2/10

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs county governing boards to designate the person or persons responsible for ensuring the proper interment of unclaimed cremated or reduced remains of veterans and their spouses, dependents, and survivors. Provides civil liability protection for designee except for incidents of gross negligence. Requires certain entities in possession of applicable unclaimed cremated or reduced remains to release remains, as well as associated veteran status information, upon request to designee. Requires same entities to notify county veterans' service officer under certain circumstances, and directs officer to report information to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and to maintain a list of any such reported information.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Providing deceased veterans with dignified burial
- Verifying the identity and veteran status of unclaimed cremains
- Burial benefits earned by veterans
- Use of columbaria for final interment of cremains

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Replaces original measure. Directs county governing boards to designate veterans' remains coordinators to identify unclaimed human remains located within the county, establish eligibility, and cause interment at a national cemetery. Outlines information that veterans' remains coordinators are to provide to county veterans' service officers. Outlines process for transferring information regarding identity and eligibility of remains, as well as of the remains themselves. Outlines responsibilities of county veterans' service officers in process. Outlines responsibility of entities that may be in possession of remains of indigent persons.

FISCAL - fiscal statement issued (indeterminate) on measure with the -1 amendment

REVENUE - No revenue impact on measure with the -1 amendment

BACKGROUND:

Cremation has become a more common option for the interment of human remains. The National Funeral Directors Association estimated that cremation was the option for 57.5 percent of deceased individuals in 2021, up from 54.8 percent in 2013. The national cremation rate is expected to reach nearly 80 percent by 2035, which would represent roughly 2.8 million cremations per year.

Any member of the U.S. Armed Forces who dies while on active duty, or veterans who are discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, may be eligible for burial in a national cemetery. This benefit also applies to spouses and dependents of veterans. However, burial benefits do not always include covering the cost.

There have been instances, both in Oregon and elsewhere, of the cremated remains of veterans being discovered and unclaimed, and thus uninterred. House Bill 4082 directs counties to designate one or more "veterans remains coordinators" to work in a volunteer capacity to identify unclaimed cremated or reduced remains located within the county, establish the eligibility of the individual for interment in a national cemetery, and arrange for the interment of the remains.