

February 5, 2026,

Good morning Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Jessica Crowson, and I am a medicolegal death investigator (MDI). I am here in my capacity as a union steward of AFSCME Local 88 to discuss the field of medicolegal death investigation and to urge this committee to vote yes on SB 1569.

I have worked in my current position as an MDI for over 4 years, and I entered the field of forensic science in 2011, with most of my experience being in medicolegal death investigation. I first began this work as a deputy coroner for a small county office. I have done work as a crime scene technician under a police department, and I have worked as an MDI in a state office before coming to work here.

For over 13 years, I have been an intermittent employee under the federal response team for mass casualty events. I've also taught forensic science at the college level for 8 years. I am one of a few hundred in this country with an advanced board certification from the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

MDIs are constantly exposed to biological and environmental hazards, as well as to conditions that many people find physically and emotionally taxing and traumatic. To drive my point home, I'd like to read you a list of scenarios and tasks that I have carried out as an MDI and that will continue to be done. In that, I hope MDIs are ingrained in your minds as you move forward with this process. As death investigators, we have and we will:

1. Wade through water to obtain decedents.
2. Climb through/on mounds of trash in homes with hoarding conditions.
3. Access crawl spaces to retrieve skeletal elements.
4. Recover deceased pets from homes after fires.
5. Climb under trains to move or retrieve decedents.
6. Maneuver through narrow areas with vast rodent and insect activity.
7. Perform extensive interviews and reenactments with parents after the unexpected death of their infant or child.
8. Clean bloodied or fluid-riddled personal effects to return them clean to next of kin.
9. Obtain fingerprints from hands heavily impacted by decomposition. Sometimes, in those same circumstances, we have examined decedents while other responders wait outside due to the strong odors.
10. Quickly return to work to investigate deaths after losing our own family members.
11. Count stab wounds or gunshot wounds present on a person.
12. Examine multiple deceased members of the same family.
13. Cradle deceased children and infants in our arms.

14. Hold the hands of strangers who have reached out to us.
15. Carefully and respectfully find the words and encouragement for decedent families.
16. Be screamed at, cursed at, and sometimes threatened by those who are (understandably) too distraught to separate the events from us simply being there to do our jobs.

Despite our best attempts to compartmentalize, MDIs won't stop being impacted by the trauma that they endure. I urge your support of SB 1569, which aligns medicolegal death investigators at the Medical Examiner's Office with PER's Police and Fire classifications.

Like many classifications within this bill, we have counterparts employed by others across the state who have already received this enhanced retirement benefit.

I've lost count of how many times I've been kindly told by families, "Wow, I'm sorry, I don't envy you; you guys have a hard job." With all of that said, the most relevant of voices we hear is that of our decedents, giving us these reminders to take care of our health while also providing us with constant cues that life is fleeting. And that's why I'm here: because MDIs listen to the evidence that decedents give us.

By voting yes on this bill, you are providing vital support to the medicolegal community, which allows us to better serve our Oregon families and their loved ones.

If you take away anything from this discussion, please remember, as you consider this proposal, that it's in the science of death where we have truly learned how to live.

I strongly urge this committee to vote yes on SB 1569. I appreciate your time and support.

Respectfully,

Jessica Crowson, F-ABMDI
AFSCME Local 88 Union Steward
Medicolegal Death Investigator