

Dear members of the Committee,

My name is Donielle Augustson, and I am providing this written testimony to express my strong support for Senate Bill 1569. I have worked as a medicolegal death investigator (MDI) for 16 years, including the past 10 years serving in our shared community.

I am truly thankful to have this job and to be able to support our community during challenging times. At the same time, I firmly believe that our work is in line with that of other first responders who receive this type of retirement benefit. In addition to the other positions proposed for inclusion in this bill, such as crime scene investigators who collaborate closely with MDIs, Senate Bill 1569 seeks to acknowledge the hazards and duties of those working alongside current benefit recipients by aligning their recognition accordingly. MDIs respond and investigate deaths in conjunction with law enforcement and fire personnel response, but our responsibilities extend beyond that. Regardless of the severity of the violence, hazardous circumstances, or trauma involved, it is our duty to investigate, recover, and care for those who have passed away.

Many departments have first responders who face difficulties coping after dealing with fatalities, and their trauma and hardships have already been recognized under previous bills. In contrast, for MDIs, every single case we handle involves a death and grieving families—some more distressing than others—but it's a constant part of our daily work. We encounter so many hazardous environments each day that it would be impossible to list them all. To help convey the true extent of our physical and mental trauma we encounter, I'd like to share a few examples.

- During Covid, we responded to scenes to recover people who died, even when law enforcement and fire personnel refused to enter.
- I've had to take dead infants from their mothers' arms more times than I care to recall.
- I have retrieved body parts and tissue from some of the filthiest and most hoarded environments imaginable.
- I have recovered the badly decomposed bodies found outside in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees.
- I have experienced verbal harassment and physical threats while on scenes, without any form of protection.
- I have retrieved the burned bodies of people from the ruins of a fire-destroyed house.

We dedicate ourselves to serving in a high-risk public safety position within this community, despite having to spend time apart from our families, working in the field during holidays, and confronting dangerous situations each day as essential workers.

Supporting SB 1569 would not only recognize the value of our work within the community, but it would also provide crucial support, enabling myself and other MDIs throughout the state to keep serving families and those impacted by the loss of a loved one.

Respectfully, I ask for your support of Senate Bill 1569. Thank you for your time and consideration on behalf of myself and everyone working in these fields.

Sincerely,  
Donielle Augustson