



KANSAS FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

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PAM SCOTT
Topeka

March 14, 2016

To: Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

From: Pam Scott, Executive Director
Kansas Funeral Directors Association

Re: House Bill No. 2518

Chairman O'Donnell and members of the Committee, the Kansas Funeral Directors Association (KFDA) thanks you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of House Bill No. 2518. The bill was introduced at the request of the KFDA and requires all death certificates and medical certifications to be filed using the Kansas electronic death registration system (EDRS) which is maintained by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's Office of Vital Statistics.

The KFDA requested the bill because the use of the EDRS speeds up the filing process. It is important that death certificates are filed in a timely manner so the disposition of the deceased can take place, families can receive certified copies of death certificates to take care of end of life business, identity theft and fraud can be avoided, and infectious diseases can be reporting to the CDC.

The Kansas EDRS system was developed in 2005 for use by funeral directors to file death records and was expanded to include the filing of medical certifications by physicians and coroners in 2010. At last report, 35.3% of the approximately 25,000 death records filed each year are currently filed totally electronically while 9.5% are filed totally by paper. The remainder are usually filed electronically by the funeral director and completed by the physician by paper which requires the completed form to be filed by mail. While most funeral directors use EDRS, physicians have lagged behind in signing up to use the system.

Kansas law requires that death certificates be filed within three days of death. This is often not achieved because for several reasons. Mail service is one major reason. The mail service to and from Topeka has become extremely slow since the United States Postal Service eliminated the mail distribution center that was in Topeka. If the death certificate is filed by mail, it usually takes more than the three days to deliver the completed death certificate to Topeka. KFDA member funeral homes in Wichita have informed me that it typically is at least a 10 day process from when a death certificate is placed in the mail to Topeka until they receive a certified copy back. For Garden City, the process averages 10 days to two weeks. If there is an error in the death certificate filing that has to be corrected, the mail process starts over. By using EDRS, these delays can be avoided because once the death certificate is completed on-line by the funeral director and physician, the death records are instantaneously filed.

The filing of death certificates are also often delayed because funeral directors have difficulty getting physicians to complete the medical certification. This is sometimes caused because the physician misplaces the paper death certificate. In such cases the funeral director must provide another copy to the physician. This delays the process especially when the physician is in another town and it has to be mailed. When using EDRS, the death record is always available on-line and cannot be lost. The system also provides e-mail notification to funeral directors and physicians that records are awaiting their action and also has a built in edit system that will find errors.

While we have discussed why delays often occur, we want to touch on why the timely filing of death certificates is important. Families of the deceased need to obtain certified copies of death certificates as soon as possible after death to take care of end of life business such as filing claims for insurance and other benefits, opening or closing bank accounts and taking care of estate issues. The Social Security Administration depends on the death notifications through the system to stop benefits being paid to deceased recipients to avoid fraud.

The CDC is interested in the speedy transmittal of fact of death information to help them quickly identify threats of infectious diseases causing death that could be spreading across the country.

The EDRS would be valuable should a mass fatality disaster strike Kansas. It will allow death certificates to be filed electronically should the transportation

system be shutdown or an epidemic occur limiting human interaction. Using the EDRS system provides a quick and safe way to file multiple death certificates without pushing paper. It also eliminates the possibility of confidential paperwork being seen by people who should not see it.

In conclusion, EDRS only works if funeral directors, physicians and coroners are all using the EDRS. We have worked on this legislation with the Kansas Medical Society and they do not oppose it.

The Kansas Funeral Directors Association would like to ask for your support of this legislation. We thank you for the opportunity to testify and would be happy to respond to any questions you or the committee may have.