



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

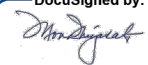
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
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Agenda Number:

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: County Executive Office
Department No.: 012
Agenda Date: September 23, 2025
Placement: Administrative Agenda
Estimated Time:
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director: Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer
Contact: Clare Tobin, Legislative Analyst
SUBJECT: Adopt Support Position for Legislation on Coroners and In-Custody Deaths - AB 1108

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County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Adopt a position to support Assembly Bill (AB) 1108, which would prohibit a sheriff-coroner from determining the circumstances, manner, and cause of death for any in-custody death and instead would require contracting with another county or a private third-party medical examination provider for those determinations; and
- b) Find that the proposed action is an organizational or administrative activity that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment and is therefore not a project under CEQA Guidelines 14 CCR 15378(b)(5).

Summary Text:

At the September 16, 2025 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board expressed a desire to support AB 1108 – “County officers: coroners: in-custody deaths,” authored by Assembly Member Gregg Hart and passed by the Legislature on September 13, 2025. Currently, the Sheriff-Coroner conducts all autopsies for in-custody deaths in our county jails. This bill would require the County to contract with another county or third party for performance of these autopsies. Because the County Legislative Platform does not specifically address the issues raised in the bill, Board direction is needed. If the Board votes to approve the recommended actions, the County’s legislative advocates will send a letter to the Governor requesting his signature on the bill.

Discussion:

On September 16, 2025 the Board addressed reports from the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury entitled “Fatal Head Injury at the Northern Branch Jail: A Custody-Related Death Investigation,” “Another Suicide in Santa Barbara County Jail: Inmate’s Death Should Have Been Prevented,” and “Preventable Death at the Northern Branch Jail: A Death-in-Custody Investigation.” In discussing the responses to these reports, members of the Board expressed support for AB 1108 and asked staff to bring an agenda item on this bill for the Board’s consideration.

Background:

AB 1108 includes the following key provisions:

- In any county where the offices of the sheriff and the coroner are combined, the sheriff-coroner shall not determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of death for any in-custody death.
 - A sheriff-coroner office may contract with one or more counties that have a coroner's office that operates independently from the office of the sheriff or another county that has established an office of medical examiner.
 - A sheriff-coroner office may contract with one or more private third-party medical examination providers that are separate and independent from the office of the sheriff-coroner and subject to specified physician qualification requirements.
- A county board of supervisors is required to annually select and enter into one or more service agreements with medical examiners or independent coroner offices from other counties, or with one or more private third-party medical examination providers.
- For any in-custody death, the cause and manner of death listed on the death certificate must match the cause and manner of death determined by the coroner, medical examiner, or third-party medical examination provider.
- In-custody deaths include the death of a person who is:
 - Detained, under arrest, or in the process of being arrested;
 - En route to be incarcerated;
 - Incarcerated at a municipal or county jail, state prison, state-run boot camp prison, boot camp prison that is contracted out by the state, any state or local contract facility, or other local or state correctional facility, including any juvenile facility;
 - In a medical facility while in law-enforcement custody; or
 - Detained, under arrest, or in the process of being detained or arrested by a federal law enforcement officer, including for the purposes of immigration enforcement, or at a federal correctional facility or immigration detention facility, when the sheriff-coroner has jurisdiction or the federal government has requested an autopsy be performed by the sheriff-coroner's office.
- Effective January 1, 2027.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

AB 1108 could have the following fiscal impacts for counties with a combined sheriff-coroner office:

- If a county contracts with another county or private third-party medical examination provider, the county will be responsible for those costs, which may include workload costs for coordination, transportation costs, and costs for the examination itself.

- A county could realize cost savings from not performing certain examinations, which may or may not offset the cost of contracted examinations.
- The Commission on State Mandates will determine if the duties imposed by this bill constitute a reimbursable state mandate, in which case the state will pay counties' costs.

In Santa Barbara County:

- The Coroner Bureau is primarily funded by County General Fund, with a small amount funded by fees for report copies and for transportation to funeral homes.
- The estimated cost for a contracted in-custody death investigation and autopsy is approximately \$5,000-\$10,000 each.
- If 1-3 deaths occur annually as has historically been the case and those autopsies and investigations are performed by a contractor, the workload reduction to the Coroner Bureau would be minimal and would not reduce the Bureau's needed staffing level. As such, no savings would be available to offset contracting costs.

Special Instructions:

No special instructions are needed.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Draft AB 1108 Support Letter to the Governor

Contact Information:

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