

SUBJECT: Anatomical gifts for forensic science programs

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Delisi, Laubenberg, Coleman, Dawson, Jackson, McReynolds, Solis, Truitt, Zedler
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Lori Baker, Jess Kelly, Susan Wallace, Baylor University
Against — None

BACKGROUND: The Texas Anatomic Gift Act, Health and Safety Code, ch. 692, designates entities that may receive anatomical gifts. Authorized entities that may receive and use anatomical gifts for therapy or transplantation include organ procurement organizations, hospitals or physicians, organ banks, or specified individuals. Anatomical gifts for education or research must be made to the Texas Anatomical Board, which distributes them among the academic institutions in the state.

DIGEST: HB 2180 would add forensic science programs at public and private universities to the list of eligible recipients of bodies or parts of bodies. Those gifts would not be required to be distributed by the Texas Anatomical Board.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 2180 would enable universities to conduct forensic research into the decomposition of bodies. Baylor University's forensic science program would create an outdoor, secure decomposition facility at which researchers could monitor the decay of human tissue under real-world situations, such as rain, sun, and the presence of insects or animals. A similar facility is located at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. This bill would permit Texas to develop a body of research under the state's unique environmental conditions.

Baylor University's forensic science program is the only one of its kind in Texas. The faculty assist law enforcement, and the program incorporates many disciplines, including criminology, chemistry, pre-medical coursework, and psychology. It is designed for students who intend to attend medical school or graduate school or to work in crime laboratories or for government agencies.

Universities are fully capable of handling bodies as their labs often deal with tissue samples and non-human cadavers. Their labs are equipped to ensure security and proper handling of any body they might receive.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Texas should permit the use of donated human bodies and body parts only for health-related functions — either for transplants or for biomedical research and education. People who agree to donate their bodies expect that they will be put to a use that improves the health of the people left behind. It is ghoulish and inappropriate for the state to permit any other use.

The bill would not specify how the bodies could be used. Once in the possession of the university, the bodies could be used for training of cadaver dogs, automobile crash tests, munitions tests, or any other research conducted by the forensic science department.

This bill would not protect the security and privacy of human bodies. The current policy of limiting cadaver delivery to graduate medical education facilities that have been inspected and certified by the Anatomical Board ensures that the facilities are clean, secure, private, have appropriate ventilation and cooling, and many other factors that should be established before a donated body can be sent.

NOTES:

The companion bill SB 995 by Averitt, passed the Senate on the Local and Uncontested Calendar on April 21 and has been referred to the House Public Health Committee.