

BILL ANALYSIS

H.B. 2180
By: Anderson
Public Health
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

One particular area of need for state law enforcement is reliable data on decomposition of bodies. The closest such facility is located at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and the data produced is not necessarily reliable in the different climatic and terrain conditions of Texas. In addition, state law enforcement officials often do not have the budget to travel to out-of-state training seminars, and experts from the facility in Tennessee are usually not available to assist with investigations in Texas. A decomposition facility at a forensic science program in Texas would help resolve both problems, offering a training site to state law enforcement personnel and further developing a network of forensic anthropologists available to assist these investigators.

Founded in 1999, Baylor University's forensic science program has grown to roughly 500 students and is the only undergraduate program of its kind in Texas. Baylor's forensic science faculty assist law enforcement in various capacities, and graduates of the program provide excellent candidates for the state's medical schools, graduate schools, and law enforcement agencies.

Baylor's forensic science program proposes to establish a decomposition facility in which the rate of decay of bodies in different settings can be monitored to better inform crime scene investigation. However, current law only allows bodies or body parts to be donated to an entity that is on a statutory list. To develop a decomposition facility, Baylor must be designated as an eligible donees of bodies. This bill allows for that designation.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

The bill adds that a forensic science program at a defined general academic teaching institution or private or independent institution of higher education may be donees of gifts of bodies or parts of bodies. Makes a conforming change.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2005.