

By: Callegari

H.B. No. 1009

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to procedures for obtaining informed consent before certain postmortem examinations or autopsies.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. This Act shall be known as the Jerry Carswell Memorial Act.

SECTION 2. Chapter 49, Code of Criminal Procedure, is amended by adding Subchapter C to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER C. INFORMED CONSENT FOR POSTMORTEM EXAMINATION OR  
AUTOPSY

Art. 49.31. APPLICABILITY. This subchapter does not apply to an autopsy that:

(1) is ordered by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or an authorized official of the department in accordance with Section 501.055, Government Code; or

(2) a justice of the peace or medical examiner determines is required under this chapter or other law.

Art. 49.32. CONSENT TO POSTMORTEM EXAMINATION OR AUTOPSY.

(a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) of this article, a physician may not perform, or assist in the performance of, a postmortem examination or autopsy on the body of a deceased person unless the physician obtains the written informed consent of a person authorized to provide consent under Article 49.33 of this code. The consent must be provided on the form prescribed under

1 Article 49.34 of this code.

2 (b) If, after due diligence, a physician is unable to  
3 identify or contact a person authorized to give consent under  
4 Article 49.33 of this code, the physician may, as authorized by a  
5 medical examiner, justice of the peace, or county judge, as  
6 appropriate, perform a postmortem examination or autopsy on the  
7 body of a deceased person not less than 24 hours and not more than 48  
8 hours from the time of the decedent's death or the time the  
9 physician or other person took possession of the body.

10 Art. 49.33. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO CONSENT TO POSTMORTEM  
11 EXAMINATION OR AUTOPSY. (a) Subject to Subsections (b) and (c) of  
12 this article, consent for a postmortem examination or autopsy may  
13 be given by any member of the following classes of persons who is  
14 reasonably available, in the order of priority listed:

15 (1) the spouse of the decedent;

16 (2) the person acting as guardian of the person of the  
17 decedent at the time of death or the executor or administrator of  
18 the decedent's estate;

19 (3) the adult children of the decedent;

20 (4) the parents of the decedent; and

21 (5) the adult siblings of the decedent.

22 (b) If there is more than one member of a class listed in  
23 Subsection (a)(2), (3), (4), or (5) of this article entitled to give  
24 consent to a postmortem examination or autopsy, consent may be  
25 given by a member of the class unless that member knows of an  
26 objection by another member of the class. If an objection is known,  
27 the consent may be given only by a majority of the members of the

class who are reasonably available.

(c) A person may not give consent under this article if, at the time of the decedent's death, a person in a class granted higher priority under Subsection (a) of this article is reasonably available to give consent or to object to a postmortem examination or autopsy.

Art. 49.34. POSTMORTEM EXAMINATION OR AUTOPSY CONSENT FORM. The commissioner of state health services, in consultation with the Texas Medical Board, shall prescribe a standard written consent form for a postmortem examination or autopsy. The form must:

(1) include the name of the hospital or other institution and the department that will perform the examination or autopsy;

(2) provide the family of the deceased person with an opportunity to place restrictions or special limitations on the examination or autopsy;

(3) provide for documented and witnessed consent;

(4) include information regarding the rights described by Article 49.35 of this code;

(5) include a separate section regarding the disposition of organs and tissue after the examination or autopsy, including a prioritized list of the persons authorized to control that disposition, as provided by Chapter 692A, Health and Safety Code;

(6) list the circumstances under which a medical examiner is required by law to conduct an investigation, inquest, or autopsy under Article 49.25 of this code;

1           (7) include a statement that the form is required by  
2 state law; and

3           (8) be written in plain language designed to be easily  
4 understood by the average person.

5           Art. 49.35. RIGHT TO NONAFFILIATED PHYSICIAN. (a) A person  
6 authorized to consent to a postmortem examination or autopsy under  
7 Article 49.33 of this code may request that a physician who is not  
8 affiliated with the hospital or other institution where the  
9 deceased person died attend or perform the postmortem examination  
10 or autopsy.

11           (b) A representative of the hospital or other institution  
12 shall inform the person of the person's right to request the  
13 attendance at or performance of a postmortem examination or autopsy  
14 by a nonaffiliated physician before the person consents to the  
15 postmortem examination or autopsy.

16           (c) A person requesting a nonaffiliated physician to attend  
17 or perform a postmortem examination or autopsy shall bear the  
18 additional costs incurred as a result of the nonaffiliated  
19 physician's attendance at or performance of the examination or  
20 autopsy.

21           SECTION 3. Section 501.055(d), Government Code, is amended  
22 to read as follows:

23           (d) If the next of kin consents to the autopsy or does not  
24 within eight hours of the time of death object to the department  
25 about the autopsy, the department or an authorized official of the  
26 department shall order an autopsy to be conducted on the inmate.  
27 The order of an autopsy under this subsection constitutes consent

1 to an autopsy for the purposes of Article 49.32 [~~49.13(b)~~], Code of  
2 Criminal Procedure.

3 SECTION 4. Article 49.13, Code of Criminal Procedure, is  
4 repealed.

5 SECTION 5. (a) Not later than December 31, 2011, the  
6 Department of State Health Services shall prescribe the written  
7 consent form required under Article 49.34, Code of Criminal  
8 Procedure, as added by this Act.

9 (b) Notwithstanding Subchapter C, Chapter 49, Code of  
10 Criminal Procedure, as added by this Act, a physician is not  
11 required to comply with the requirements of that subchapter until  
12 January 1, 2012.

13 SECTION 6. (a) Except as provided by Subsection (b) of this  
14 section, this Act takes effect September 1, 2011.

15 (b) Sections 3 and 4 of this Act take effect January 1, 2012.