

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 1199
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Criminal Justice
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Under current law, when an inmate dies while in the custody of a law enforcement agency, an investigation is launched and conducted by an outside law enforcement agency to determine the inmate's cause of death. For facilities operated by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), there are two circumstances where a full investigation is not required: if the individual dies of natural causes while attended by a physician or is lawfully executed. For county jails, every custodial death requires an investigation, with no exceptions. However, there are instances when an inmate's death does not indicate wrongdoing nor does it fall within the two exceptions for TDCJ facilities. Unexpected, natural deaths, such as cardiac arrest or cancer, can and do occur, and should not require a criminal investigation.

S.B. 1199 would reform regulations regarding the natural death of an inmate in a county jail so that a criminal investigation by an outside law enforcement agency is not required. However, the cause of death must still be determined by a physician during an autopsy or examination of the deceased. This change would more closely align custodial deaths by natural causes in county jails with the natural causes exception applied to TDCJ facilities.

As proposed, S.B. 1199 amends current law relating to the investigation of the death of a prisoner in county jail.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 511.021(a), Government Code, as follows:

- (a) Requires the Commission on Jail Standards, on the death of a prisoner in a county jail, other than a death from natural causes as determined by a physician during an autopsy or examination of the deceased prisoner, to appoint a law enforcement agency, other than the local law enforcement agency that operates the county jail, to investigate the death as soon as possible.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2025.