

CHAPTER 366.

INQUESTS OF THE DEAD.

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366.01 Inquests. Whenever the district attorney shall have notice of the death of any person within his county and from the circumstances surrounding the same there is good reason to believe that murder or manslaughter has been committed, he shall forthwith order and require the coroner, deputy coroner or in the event of the absence or disability of the coroner, or any deputy coroner, some justice of the peace therein to take an inquest on the view of the dead body of such person. For the purpose of taking such inquest deputy coroners may perform all the duties and exercise all the jurisdiction and powers conferred upon such coroners by this chapter and shall be entitled to the same fees as such coroner for the performance of like duties, except as hereinafter provided. Provided, however, that nothing herein contained shall be construed as preventing such coroner from holding an inquest without being first notified by the district attorney so to hold such inquest. Such inquest shall be held in the county, if within this state, where the wrongful act or accident occurred which resulted in the death, notwithstanding the fact that the person wounded, injured, or dying, dies in another county. [1931 c. 134]

Note: District attorney should not withhold his certificate of approval for witnesses' and jurors' fees in coroner's inquest even though district attorney believes there were no grounds for holding inquest. 21 Atty. Gen. 361.

See note to 48.01, citing 26 Atty. Gen. 335. Section 59.77 requires that district attorney examine and approve accounts of coroner. 26 Atty. Gen. 431.

366.02 Jury to be called. Whenever any coroner, deputy coroner or justice of the peace shall hold an inquest, he shall issue a precept to the sheriff or any constable forthwith to summon a jury of six good and lawful men of the county to appear before him at the time and place specified in the precept, which precept shall be in substance as follows: THE STATE OF WISCONSIN, to the sheriff or any constable of the county of . . . :

You are hereby required immediately to summon six good and lawful men of the county of . . . , to appear forthwith before me at . . . , in the town of . . . , to inquire upon the view of the body of, there lying dead, how and by what means he came to his death.

Given under my hand this . . . day of . . . , 19 . . .

Coroner.

366.03 Officers' return. Every officer to whom such precept shall be directed and delivered shall forthwith execute the same and make return of the precept, with his proceedings thereon, to the justice who issued the same.

366.04 His neglect; nonappearance of juror. If any officer shall refuse or neglect to execute such precept or to return the same as aforesaid he shall forfeit and pay the sum of five dollars, and every person summoned as a juror as aforesaid, who shall fail to appear without having a reasonable excuse, shall forfeit and pay a sum not exceeding five dollars.

366.05 Other jurors; oath. If six jurors shall not appear at the time and place appointed the coroner may require the officer to summon such number of jurors as shall make up the number six, and when the requisite number so summoned shall appear the coroner shall there, in view of the dead body, administer to them an oath or affirmation in substance as follows, viz.: You do solemnly swear that you will diligently inquire in behalf of this state when, in what manner and by what means the person whose body lies here dead came to his death; that you will return a true inquest thereon according to your knowledge and such evidence as shall be laid before you.

366.06 Witnesses; physician's fees. The coroner may issue subpoenas for witnesses, returnable forthwith or at such time and place as he shall therein direct, and the attendance of the persons so served with such subpoena may be enforced in the same manner, and they shall be subject to the same penalties as if they had been served with a subpoena in behalf of this state to attend a justice's court; and it shall be lawful for the coroner taking such inquest, in all such cases, to require by subpoena the attendance of

one or more competent physicians or surgeons for the purpose of making an examination of the body and of testifying as to the result of the same. Such physicians and surgeons so subpoenaed shall, instead of witness' fees, receive such reasonable compensations as may be allowed by the county board; provided, that such additional compensation shall not be less than five dollars for each examination.

366.07 Witness' oath. An oath or affirmation to the following effect shall be administered to each witness by the coroner: You do solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this inquest concerning the death of the person here dead shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

366.08 Evidence to be written; stenographer. In all cases the testimony of all witnesses examined before the inquest shall be reduced to writing by the coroner, or some other person by his direction, and subscribed by the witnesses. Any officer authorized to take inquests may employ a stenographer to take and transcribe the testimony of all witnesses examined at any inquest held by him. Such stenographer shall receive ten cents per folio for all the testimony taken and transcribed by him, his account therefor, after being audited by the proper county board, shall be paid by the county treasurer.

366.09 Verdict. The jury, upon the inspection of the body and after hearing the testimony of the witnesses and making all needful inquiries, shall draw up and deliver to the coroner their inquisition under their hands, in which they shall find and certify when, and in what manner and by what means the deceased came to his death, and his name, if known; and if it shall appear that he came to his death by unlawful means the jurors shall further state who was guilty, either as principal or accessory or were in any manner the cause of his death, if known.

Note: Coroner's jury must reach unanimous verdict and can render only such verdict as members can agree upon. 23 Atty. Gen. 578.

366.10 Form of. Such inquisition may be in substance in the following form:

An inquisition taken at, in the county of, on the day of, 19. . . ., before, the coroner of the said county, upon the view of the body of (or a person unknown), there dead, by the jurors whose names are hereunto subscribed, who being duly sworn to inquire on behalf of this state, when, in what manner and by what means the said (or person unknown) came to his death, upon their oaths do say (here insert when, in what manner and by what means, persons, weapons or instruments he was killed or came to his death.)

In testimony whereof, the said coroner and the jurors of this inquest have hereunto set their hands the day and year aforesaid.

366.11 Witnesses to be bound. If the jury find that any murder, manslaughter or assault has been committed upon the deceased the coroner shall bind over, by recognizance, such witnesses as he shall think necessary to appear and testify at the next court to be held in the same county at which an indictment for such offense may be found or an information filed; and he shall also return to the same court the requisition, written evidence and all recognizances and examinations by him taken, and may commit to the jail of the county any witness who shall refuse to recognize in such manner as he shall direct.

Note: It is duty of coroner to make return of proceedings at inquest to court which has jurisdiction of subject matter regardless of whether or not information has been filed therein. 26 Atty. Gen. 431.

366.12 Warrant for person charged. If any person charged by the inquest with having committed any such offense shall not be in custody the coroner shall issue a warrant for his apprehension, and such warrant shall be made returnable before any other magistrate or court having cognizance of the case, who shall proceed thereon in the manner that is required of magistrates in like cases.

366.13 Burial of body. When any coroner shall take an inquest upon the view of the dead body of a stranger or, being called for that purpose, shall not think it necessary on view of such body that an inquest should be taken, he shall cause the body to be decently buried or cremated; and the said coroner shall certify to all the charges incurred in taking any inquest by him and to the expenses of burial or cremation of such dead body; and the same shall be audited by the county board of the proper county and paid out of the county treasury.

366.14 Compensation of officers; witness fees. The sole compensation of the coroner and deputy coroners for taking inquest or making an investigation to determine the necessity to take inquest shall be eight dollars for each day and four dollars for each half day actually and necessarily required for the purpose, and ten cents for each mile actually and necessarily traveled in performing such duty; provided, that any coroner or deputy coroner who is paid an annual salary by the county shall not be entitled to any additional compensation for services in taking inquests. The compensation of jurors and of constables and witnesses at such inquest shall be the same as is allowed for like services in justice court. [1935 c. 197]

366.15 Inquests; counties over 150,000. In each and every county whose inhabitants exceed in number one hundred and fifty thousand all the duties mentioned in the foregoing sections of this chapter shall be performed by the coroner thereof, who is hereby invested with the exclusive jurisdiction and power to take inquests therein, except that he may be assisted in so doing by the deputy coroner thereof, and in case of the inability of the coroner to attend to such duties his deputy may perform them.

366.16 Coroner; assistants; salaries; fees; report. Such coroner, deputy coroner and his assistants shall be paid monthly out of the county treasury of the proper county, for the performance of all their official duties and in lieu of all other compensation salaries to be fixed by the county board of such county, such coroner, his deputy and assistants for him, shall collect for all services which he or they may perform (except in cases where such county is solely liable therefor) all such fees as he is by law entitled to receive, and shall keep accurate books of account in which shall be entered from day to day, the items of services rendered, the titles of the proceedings in which and the names of the persons for whom rendered, and the fees charged and received, and shall, at the end of every three months, render to the county board of such county and to the county treasurer an accurate report or statement verified by his oath, of all fees and income collected by him or for him during such three months and also of all the expenses of his office during the same time; and at the same time he shall pay to the treasurer of such county all such fees and income of every kind, collected by him, his deputy or assistants, or which he was entitled by law to charge or receive, not theretofore paid to the said treasurer.

366.17 Office and records. It shall be the duty of the county board of such county to provide for the use of such coroner a suitable office room at the county seat of the county, and it shall be the duty of such coroner to keep in his said office proper books containing records of all inquests by him held, setting forth the time and place of holding such inquests and the names of the jurors serving thereon, together with a brief statement of the proceedings thereof.

366.18 Coroner's bond. Before entering upon the duties of his office every coroner of such county shall deliver to the proper officer thereof a bond, subscribed by two or more sufficient sureties, in such penal sum as the county board may determine, conditioned for the faithful performance of all his official duties as set forth in this chapter and that he will faithfully account for and pay to the treasurer of said county all moneys which may come to his hands belonging to said county, and which by virtue of this chapter he is required to account for and pay as aforesaid.

366.19 Cremation of corpse regulated. (1) The body of a deceased person shall not be cremated within 48 hours after its decease unless death was caused by a contagious or infectious disease, and, if the death occurred within the state, the body shall not be received or cremated by any person, firm, copartnership or corporation not authorized by the state board of health to cremate the bodies of the dead until its officers have received the certificate of burial permit required by law before burial, and a certificate from the coroner of the county, where said person died, and if such person died without the state, then from the coroner of the county where said body is to be cremated, that he has viewed the body and made personal inquiry into the cause and manner of death and is of the opinion that no further examination or judicial inquiry concerning the same is necessary. The heirs or next of kin shall agree with the funeral director as to the final disposition of the cremated remains before such burial permit is issued. The method of such disposition shall be noted on the death certificate and no change in the disposition of such remains shall be permitted. Such disposition shall be consummated within 60 days from time of such notation on the death certificate. The cremated remains or ashes shall not be deposited in the cemetery without due notification and permission of the cemetery authorities.

(2) It shall be the duty of the respective coroners of this state, in any case where the body is to be cremated, to view and make a careful personal inquiry into the cause and manner of death, and conduct an autopsy or order the conducting of an autopsy, if in their opinion it is necessary to determine the cause and manner of death, and thereupon certify that no further examination or judicial inquiry concerning the same is necessary, if so satisfied, otherwise, or in the event of doubt to proceed as otherwise provided by law.

(3) The coroner shall receive a fee of ten dollars, to be paid out of the county treasury, for each body so viewed or inquiry so made.

(4) Whoever shall accept, receive or take any body of a deceased person with intent to destroy the same by means of cremation, or who shall cremate or aid and assist in the cremation of any body of a deceased person without having presented such coroner's certificate heretofore provided for shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction, shall be fined not less than five hundred dollars nor more than one thousand dollars, or be imprisoned not less than six months nor more than one year. [1935 c. 247; 1941 c. 289]