2001 ASSEMBLY BILL 604

October 29, 2001 – Introduced by Representatives Johnsrud, Pettis, Suder, Loeffelholz, Huebsch, Ladwig, Ott, Albers, Musser, Bies, Gunderson, Freese, Sykora, Stone, Williams, Vrakas, Petrowski, Underheim, Kreibich and Shilling, cosponsored by Senator Darling. Referred to Committee on Personal Privacy.

- 1 AN ACT *to create* 979.028 of the statutes; **relating to:** confidentiality of autopsy
- 2 reports.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Under current law, the public generally has a right to inspect or copy public records unless otherwise provided by law or unless the custodian of the record demonstrates that the public interest in withholding access to a record outweighs the strong public interest in providing access. Public records include any writing, drawing, or printed, spoken, visual, or electromagnetic information that is recorded or preserved, and that is maintained by a government entity or government official. Autopsy reports, including pictures taken during autopsies, are public records, if maintained by a government official or entity, including a coroner, medical examiner, or district attorney. Autopsy records are therefore open to public inspection unless a current law exception applies to the records (for example, district attorney records are generally confidential) or unless the custodian determines that the public interest in withholding an autopsy report outweighs the public interest in providing access.

This bill creates an exception to the public right to inspect or copy public records specifically for autopsy reports. The bill also prohibits the custodian of an autopsy record or any person involved in conducting an autopsy from releasing to the public any information learned during an autopsy concerning the deceased or the cause of

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his or her death without permission from the deceased's next of kin, except information necessary to complete the medical certification on a certificate of death.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. 979.028 of the statutes is created to read:

979.028 Confidentiality of autopsy records. Autopsy records, including photographs or other pictorial images of a deceased person that are taken during an autopsy, are confidential and are not subject to the right of inspection or copying under s. 19.35 (1). Except as required to complete a medical certification of death under s. 69.18 (2), the custodian of an autopsy record or a person involved in conducting an autopsy may not release to the public any information learned as a result of an autopsy concerning the deceased or the cause of his or her death without permission from the deceased's next of kin.

10 (END)