

2015 Regular Session

SENATE BILL NO. 208

BY SENATOR RISER

Prefiled pursuant to Article III, Section 2(A)(4)(b)(i) of the Constitution of Louisiana.

CORONERS. Provides for disposition of remains. (7/1/15)

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

AN ACT

To amend and reenact R.S. 9:1551 and R.S. 37:876 and to enact R.S. 8:1(20.1) and 655(D), relative to human remains; to provide relative to the release and disposition of human remains; to provide for definitions; to provide relative to the disposition of human remains in the possession of a funeral establishment or healthcare facility; to provide relative to abandoned human remains; to provide relative to the authorized agent for cremation; and to provide for related matters.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. R.S. 8:1(20.1) and 655(D) are hereby enacted to read as follows:

§1. Definitions

As used in this Title the following words and phrases, unless the context otherwise clearly indicates, shall have the meaning hereinafter ascribed to each:

\* \* \*

**(20.1) "Disposition" means the interment, burial, cremation, or anatomical donation of the body of a deceased person or parts of the body of a deceased person. Disposition shall not include any prohibited act under the Louisiana Anatomical Gift Act, the Louisiana Anatomical Board Act, the**

1        **Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act, or the Louisiana**  
2        **Historic Cemetery Preservation Act.**

3                                \*        \*        \*

4        §655. Right of disposing of remains; military personnel; limitation of liability

5                                \*        \*        \*

6                                **D. In the event that the coroner releases the remains of the decedent to**  
7        **an interested person pursuant to R.S. 9:1551(A)(1), such person shall have the**  
8        **right to control the disposition of the remains of the decedent.**

9        Section 2. R.S. 9:1551 is hereby amended and reenacted to read as follows:

10       §1551. ~~Burial of unclaimed bodies~~ **Disposition of remains**

11                                A.(1) Upon oral or written refusal by ~~next of kin, as provided~~ **the person or**  
12        **persons authorized** in R.S. 8:655, to ~~bury~~ **provide for the disposition of the**  
13        **remains of** a decedent, the coroner is authorized to immediately release the remains  
14        of the decedent to any interested ~~party~~ **person** who will claim the remains and  
15        provide ~~interment~~ for the **disposition of the** remains.

16                                (2) The coroner shall have **and exercise** custody ~~of over~~ the ~~bodies~~ **remains**  
17        of all persons who die within the parish and whose ~~bodies~~ **remains** are **abandoned,**  
18        not claimed ~~by friends or relatives,~~ **or unclaimed by the person or persons**  
19        **authorized in R.S. 8:655, or by the person to whom the coroner has released the**  
20        **remains under the provision of Paragraph (1) of this Subsection, and the**  
21        **remains of persons that are abandoned while in the possession of a funeral**  
22        **establishment or a healthcare facility as provided in Subsection C of this**  
23        **Section.** If the decedent had no known property or assets of a sufficient value to  
24        defray the expenses of ~~burial~~ **disposition**, the coroner shall make such disposition  
25        of the ~~body~~ **remains** of the decedent as is otherwise provided by law for indigents.

26                                B. If a decedent's ~~body is~~ **remains are not claimed,** unclaimed ~~by friends or~~  
27        **relatives, or abandoned** and the decedent had known assets or property of a  
28        sufficient value to defray the expenses of ~~burial~~ **disposition**, the coroner shall cause  
29        the ~~body~~ **remains** to be interred within thirty days, preferably by a recognized

1 funeral ~~home~~ **establishment**. The invoices for the expenses of ~~the burial~~ **disposition**  
2 shall be forwarded to the public administrator if there is one in the parish or to the  
3 clerk of the district court if there is no public administrator, and the person or official  
4 authorized by law to be appointed administrator of the succession of the decedent  
5 shall provide for the payment of the ~~burial~~ **disposition** expenses out of the assets of  
6 the decedent in accordance with the existing provisions of law for the administration  
7 of successions and in accordance with the provisions of this Part.

8 **C.(1) If the remains of a decedent in the possession of a funeral**  
9 **establishment or a healthcare facility have been abandoned, the funeral**  
10 **establishment or healthcare facility shall notify by a written, notarized**  
11 **document, the coroner for the parish of the decedent's domicile stating the**  
12 **factual history and circumstances of the abandonment. This document shall**  
13 **include, but not be limited to the following information:**

14 **(a) All known next of kin, any alleged next of kin or family member, any**  
15 **interested party including organizations, whether government or private, and**  
16 **any other person contacted by the funeral home or healthcare facility regarding**  
17 **the deceased.**

18 **(b) Any known assets of the deceased, including but not limited to**  
19 **insurance policies, pending claims whether or not under litigation, any potential**  
20 **unresolved claims or any other asset of any kind.**

21 **(c) Any status of the decedent including but not limited to veteran's**  
22 **status, federal or state employment or retirement status, past or present law**  
23 **enforcement status, religious affiliations, or any kind and last known**  
24 **employment.**

25 **(d) All documents and records of any kind in the possession of the**  
26 **funeral establishment or healthcare provider, written or electronic, generated**  
27 **regarding the deceased, including but not limited to any medical records of any**  
28 **kind.**

29 **(2) Upon receipt by the coroner of the notarized document, complete**

1 with all records attached thereto, the funeral establishment or healthcare  
2 facility shall transport the human remains of the decedent at their costs to the  
3 coroner of the parish of the decedent's domicile, if located in Louisiana, or to  
4 the coroner of the parish where the death occurred if the decedent's domicile  
5 is not in Louisiana, who shall assume jurisdiction of the case, and accept the  
6 remains for future disposition all in accordance with law.

7 D. For purposes of this Section, remains of a decedent in the possession  
8 of a funeral establishment or healthcare facility shall be deemed abandoned if  
9 the person or persons authorized in R.S. 8:655 or in Subsection A of this Section  
10 to control the disposition orally or in writing refuses to make arrangement or  
11 provide for the disposition of the decedent or fails to make arrangement or to  
12 provide for the disposition of the remains of a decedent after death at a  
13 healthcare facility or after the remains are in the possession of the funeral  
14 establishment.

15 E. Once coroner jurisdiction over abandoned, not claimed or unclaimed  
16 remains has been established, all rights to control the disposition of the remains  
17 as listed in R.S. 8:655(A) are waived and terminated. The coroner shall then  
18 take and exercise custody of the remains for disposition pursuant to the  
19 provisions in this Section.

20 Section 3. R.S. 37:876 is hereby amended and reenacted to read as follows:

21 §876. Authorizing agent; notarized declarations

22 A. The following persons, in the priority listed, shall have the right to serve  
23 as an authorizing agent for cremation unless other specific directions have been  
24 given by the decedent in the form of a written and notarized declaration:

25 (1) The surviving spouse, if no petition for divorce has been filed by either  
26 spouse prior to the death of the decedent spouse.

27 (2) All of the surviving adult children of the decedent, not including  
28 grandchildren or other more remote descendants.

29 (3) The surviving parents of the decedent.

1 (4) All of the surviving adult siblings of the decedent.

2 (5) All of the surviving adult persons respectively in the next degree of  
3 kindred as provided in Civil Code Articles 880 et seq.

4 **B. If the coroner releases the remains of a decedent to an interested**  
5 **person pursuant to R.S. 9:1551(A)(1), such person may serve as the authorizing**  
6 **agent for cremation.**

7 C. If the required authorization cannot be obtained, a final judgment of a  
8 district court shall be required.

9 ~~C.~~ D. In the case of those individuals whose disposition is the responsibility  
10 of the state or any of its instrumentalities, a public administrator, medical examiner,  
11 coroner, state-appointed guardian, or any other public official charged with arranging  
12 the disposition of the decedent may serve as the authorizing agent.

13 ~~D.~~ E. No person shall be allowed to serve as an authorizing agent when a  
14 decedent has left written instructions in a notarized declaration that he does not wish  
15 to be cremated.

16 ~~E.~~ F. In the event that the decedent has made multiple notarized declarations  
17 of disposition, the last notarized declaration shall control.

18 Section 4. This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2015.

---

The original instrument and the following digest, which constitutes no part  
of the legislative instrument, were prepared by Cathy Wells.

---

DIGEST

SB 208 Original                      2015 Regular Session                      Riser

Present law provides relative to burial of unclaimed bodies.

Proposed law provides relative to disposition of human remains.

Proposed law defines "disposition" as the interment, burial, cremation, or anatomical donation of the body of a deceased person or parts of the body of a deceased person. Disposition does not include any prohibited act under the Louisiana Anatomical Gift Act, the Louisiana Anatomical Board Act, the Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Preservation Act, or the Louisiana Historic Cemetery Preservation Act.

Present law provides for surviving spouse, next of kin, and other relatives who have the right to control interment and who have the right to serve as an authorizing agent for cremation of the remains of a deceased person unless other specific written and notarized directions have been given by the decedent.

Present law authorizes the coroner to release the remains to any interested party if the surviving spouse, next of kin, and other relatives who have the right to control interment refuse to bury the remains.

Proposed law retains present law and provides for the disposition of such remains not just for burial. Proposed law further provides that if the coroner releases the remains to an interested person, such person may serve as the authorizing agent to cremation.

Present law authorizes the coroner to bury the abandoned body as provided for indigents if the decedent had no known property or assets of sufficient value to defray the expenses of burial.

Proposed law retains present law but authorizes the coroner to dispose of such abandoned remains as provided for indigents if the decedent had no known property or asset of sufficient value to defray the expenses of disposition.

Present law requires the coroner to cause a body to be interred within 30 days, preferably by a recognized funeral home if a body is unclaimed by friends or relatives and the decedent had known assets or property of a sufficient value to defray the expenses of burial.

Proposed law requires the coroner to cause human remains to be interred within 30 days, preferably by a recognized funeral establishment if such remains are not claimed, unclaimed, or abandoned and the decedent had known assets or property of a sufficient value to defray the expenses of disposition.

Proposed law requires funeral establishments and healthcare facilities to notify by a written notarized document, the coroner for the parish of the decedent's domicile stating the factual history and circumstances of the abandonment. Proposed law also lists other items required to be contained in the notification to the coroner, including but not limited to information about known next of kin; organizations the deceased was a member of; known assets, including insurance policies, pending claims under litigation, and any potential unresolved claims or asset of any kind; veteran and employment status; religious affiliation; and all documents in the possession of the funeral home or healthcare provider.

Proposed law provides that upon the coroner's receipt of the notarized document and records attached there to, the funeral home or healthcare facility is required to transport the human remains of the decedent at their costs to the coroner of the decedent's domicile, if located in Louisiana, or to the coroner of the parish where the death occurred if the decedent's domicile is not in Louisiana, is required to assume jurisdiction of the case, and accept the remains for future disposition.

Proposed law provides that the remains of a decedent in the possession of a funeral establishment or healthcare facility are deemed abandoned if the person or persons authorized by law to control the disposition orally or in writing refuses to make arrangements or provide for the disposition of the decedent, or fails to make arrangements or provide for the disposition of the remains of a decedent after death at a healthcare facility, or after the remains are in the possession of the funeral establishment.

Proposed law provides that if the coroner releases the remains to an interested person, such person may serve as the authorizing agent for cremation.

Effective on July 1, 2015.

(Amends R.S. 9:1551 and R.S. 37:876; adds R.S. 8:1(20.1) and 655(D))