

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

April 5, 2022

Support Assembly Bill 1608 (Gipson) - County Officers: Consolidation of Offices

In December 2020, [Angelo Quinto](#), a Navy veteran from Northern California, was tragically killed by the Antioch Police Department. Angelo was suffering from a mental health episode when his family called the police for help with de-escalating the situation. While Angelo laid face down and bloodied with handcuffs behind his back, a responding officer knelt on his neck for at least four and a half minutes while another officer restrained his legs. Angelo lost and never regained consciousness, and ultimately succumbed to his injuries in a hospital three days later.

The Contra Costa County Coroner’s Office determined that the cause of Angelo’s death was the result of “[excited delirium](#).” The term is attributed to sudden unexplained deaths of individuals while in police custody. In other words, it provides a justification for the use of excessive police force. The diagnosis has, in part, reinvigorated the need for greater transparency in the medical examination investigation process. It has also led to a goal of eliminating potential conflicts of interests in law enforcement.

[Assembly Bill \(AB\) 1608](#) (Gipson), County officers: Consolidation of Offices, seeks to address this perception of bias by ensuring that all local death investigations are conducted independently and objectively. Moreover, it will separate the duties of the Coroner’s Office from the duties of the Sheriff’s Office across all counties in California.

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This division will strengthen the medical examination process, thereby increasing accountability and transparency by providing independent, quality, and cause of death investigations.

The California Government Code Section 27491, the Health and Safety Code Section 102850, the Penal Code, and various other codes and regulations mandate each County within the State to perform the functions of the Coroner. Section 24304.1. of the Government Code permits County Boards of Supervisors to consolidate the duties of certain County offices, including but not limited to the Sheriff and the Coroner.

All 58 Counties in California have a Sheriff's department, but only 10 counties have a separate Coroner or Medical Examiner's office. Currently, State law does not require a Sheriff to have any medical background or certification to assume the duties of a Coroner. California is also only one of three states that allows the offices of the Coroner and the Sheriff to be combined, which perpetuates the potential for conflicts of interests in law enforcement handling the duties of the Coroner. Counties like Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco have already separated the duties of the Coroner from the Sheriff; these Coroners are independent medical examiners, who are required to be licensed physicians and surgeons duly qualified as a specialist in pathology.

Lack of oversight and transparency of Sheriff's department investigations harm not only vulnerable communities but also the entire justice system. A consistent Statewide policy towards independent Coroner's offices would help to ensure that medical examinations and investigations of sudden, violent, or unexplained/suspicious deaths are conducted objectively.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer, through the Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Division, to support Assembly Bill 1608 (Gipson).

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