



Supporting the Public Health, Safety, & Welfare Needs of Rural Counties

THE CHALLENGE

In the 2021 session, HB 1326 passed, requiring counties with less than 40,000 people to have an independent coroner by 2025.

Previously, other elected officials in smaller counties could serve in this role. Because of the new mandate, 13 rural counties are scrambling to find resources to fund this additional office in perpetuity.

THE FIX

Rural counties need help to pay the costs for new county coroners.

State support is being requested for 6 years so that rural counties have time to absorb and adjust to the new costs. **SB 5089** provides the needed funding.

COUNTIES AFFECTED BY MANDATE	POP.
Garfield County	2,300
Columbia County	3,950
Wahkiakum County	4,550
Ferry County	7,300
Lincoln County	11,125
Skamania County	12,000
Pend Oreille County	13,725
San Juan County	18,350
Adams County	21,200
Asotin County	22,650
Klickitat County	23,250
Pacific County	23,775
Jefferson County	33,425

Populations as of 2023

Reasons to support this request:

1. The new mandate disproportionately affects the most rural counties.

With smaller populations, rural counties are less able to quickly adjust to adding an entire new elected office than more populous counties that can spread such costs over a larger tax base. While counties did not object to the policy change, cost is still a factor.



2. The request is for temporary funding help.

The bill provides funding for only 6 years, which will allow the counties time to absorb the new cost and pay for it themselves by 2031.



3. This bill achieves equity for all areas of our state.

The mandate in the original bill is good policy – each of the 39 counties should be served by a professional and independent coroner. Many of the larger counties already have such a position. The remaining 13 rural counties need to modernize their systems, and they need temporary financial help to achieve it.

