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Testimony to the House Health Policy Committee

May 16, 2024

Thank you Madame Chair and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of House Bills 5043 and 5044. My name is Stacey Hettiger, Senior Director of Advocacy for the Michigan State Medical Society. MSMS is a statewide professional organization representing physicians and medical students in all stages of their careers, all specialties, and all workplace settings.

A couple of years ago, the Michigan Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) approached MSMS with draft legislation intended to help address a problem related to the timely filing of death certificates. We are greatly appreciative of their willingness to seek and accept input. MSMS believes the bills before you today will streamline and improve the process for promptly filing death certificates.

Physicians take seriously their responsibility to complete the medical portion of the death certificate accurately and promptly as possible. In doing so, they are expected to use medical training, knowledge of medicine, available medical history, symptoms, diagnostic tests, and/or autopsy results to render an opinion on the cause of death. This final act of caring for patients has broad impact including giving peace of mind to loved ones, avoiding delays in burials or cremations, helping to settle estates, determining beneficiary-related issues, and informing researchers and policy makers related to population-based health goals.

House Bills 5043 and 5044 will require the use of electronic death certificates and training in how to use the system. MSMS concurs that widespread use of Michigan's Electronic Death Registration System is instrumental in meeting these goals/impacts I just mentioned. Intuitive electronic registration systems can provide efficiencies and accuracy, such as prompts if information entered isn't specific enough, as well as convenient access and routing.

As we move forward on this issue, communication between funeral directors and physicians is critical. MSMS looks forward to continuing to work with MFDA, MDHHS, vital records officials, and other parties to provide that death certificates are completed in a timely manner and, should these bills pass, to ensure they are implemented as intended.

Thank you for your consideration of MSMS's support as you deliberate House Bills 5043 and 5044.