

AB 1608 Talking Points

Assembly Bill 1608 is a critical criminal legal bill that promotes just and unbiased investigations by separating the coroner's responsibilities from a sheriff's oversight.

- Assembly Bill 1608 will help create a system that prioritizes objectivity, transparency, and accountability throughout California.
- Assembly Bill 1608 will be one way to balance power and allow for increased accountability and transparency.
- The sheriff is a powerful elected official. The position can have broad responsibilities ranging from balancing a budget to managing county jails to assuming the duties of the coroner. The sheriff often runs uncontested in elections; over time, the sheriff has amassed broad power and often operates with little to no oversight or accountability. All 58 counties in California have a sheriff's department.
- In 48 counties in our state, the sheriff assumes the duties of the coroner. This means that the sheriff could investigate or oversee investigations that involve his/her office or that of the local police department, creating an inherent conflict of interest.
- Assembly Bill 1608 would provide a clear delineation between the sheriff and the coroner to ensure that an independent coroner is making determinations regarding both the type of and manner of death. It's a critical step in ensuring both medical and civil integrity in our criminal legal system.
- Making the coroner independent from the sheriff is important because it increases transparency, removes potential conflicts of interest, and increases objectivity in the process of determining the cause of death of an individual, including in-custody deaths. It reduces the perception that the process is unduly influenced by law enforcement, and removes conflicts of interest present when there is an officer-involved death which disproportionately impacts communities of color. It makes it clear that the investigative process is seeking the truth through a fair, unbiased, transparent, and impartial office.

- AB 1608 also has larger implications towards the criminal legal system by ensuring that all deaths are investigated equally, and medical determinations cannot be influenced by laypersons. Today 10 counties in California have made the coroner independent from the sheriff. Californians in *every* county deserve access to a fair, unbiased and transparent process.