

STATE OF COLORADO

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John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

June 1, 2018

The Honorable Colorado Senate
State Capitol
200 E. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Members of the Colorado Senate:

Today, I vetoed Senate Bill 18-223, “Concerning the Circumstances Under Which an Autopsy Report Prepared in Connection with the Death of a Minor May be Released to Certain Parties” at 3:36. Senate Bill 18-223 (“SB 18-223”) places restrictions on public disclosure, with exceptions, by coroners of an autopsy report for the death of a minor - curbing public and media access to such information.

After reviewing all committee hearing records, visiting with the bill’s proponents and opponents, and reviewing comments from families, coroners, and reporters, it is clear that both sides of this debate share the same goal: limiting deaths of Colorado youths and preventing further trauma to families. At its core, the issue before us is the proper balance between protecting grieving families from continued trauma due to public disclosure, and permitting such information disclosure to prevent future tragedies.

History shows that bringing tragedies to the public’s attention is the greatest catalyst for public policy change. Transparency can lead to enhanced government protections, greater public and private resources, and heightened public understanding and demand for change. We need not look far for examples in which public disclosure, media scrutiny, and good journalism led to positive changes to prevent tragedies, particularly in areas such as child neglect, abuse, and trafficking. While crafted for the very laudable goal of protecting families from additional pain caused by public knowledge of a child’s death, we cannot ignore that SB 18-223 hampers public disclosure. And we are particularly concerned by the bill’s broad language limiting disclosure of not only youth suicides, but *any* death of a minor.

Few circumstances can ever match the trauma of losing a child, and we commend the sponsors for their desire to protect families of deceased children from continued pain. For these reasons, we do not issue this veto lightly. We remain persuaded, however, that sunshine on uncomfortable and painful topics such as youth deaths can lead to more positive outcomes for other youths, stemming from how we collectively react to the knowledge of youth deaths. An informed public has societal benefits for all at-risk children, present and future. Accordingly, Senate Bill 18-223 is vetoed.

Sincerely,

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor