

Education

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Governor signs bill to seal some autopsies

He also restores special education funding, begins phasing out copper brakes

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger Monday signed three bills generated in [San Diego County](#), including one that will give parents the right to seal autopsy reports and photographs of their murdered children.

The autopsy bill grew out of the twin tragedies involving the separate slayings of teenagers [Chelsea King](#) of Poway and Amber Dubois of Escondido.

The governor also signed legislation that will greatly reduce the level of toxic copper in vehicle brake pads, potentially sparing the city of San Diego pollution fines and the cost of new water treatment facilities.

The third bill sponsored by San Diego County school authorities and carried by Assemblyman [Marty Block](#), D-San Diego, clears up a technical glitch from last year's budget that threatened to force local districts to cumulatively repay \$17 million used for special education programs.

The oversight forced districts to scramble, starting at raiding reserves or cutting spending. The San Diego Unified School District, for example, launched contingency plans to dip into its meager savings to cover an anticipated \$9 million loss.

If left unfixed, the glitch would have required the Department of Education to collect \$70 million in special education funds that had already been distributed to schools statewide.

Sen. [Dennis Hollingsworth](#), a Republican who represents much of north San Diego County, introduced the autopsy bill in the wake of media requests for reports on the rapes and murders of Chelsea and Amber.

"There is simply no convincing public interest in the broadcast of lurid autopsy documents that should prevail over the rights of a family to keep private the final, desperate moments of their child's life," he said in a statement.

San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis pushed for the bill. In a statement, she called it a "collaborative effort to protect crime victims' families."

Media representatives had protested the reach of the bill, saying it could lead to the loss of public oversight and potentially permit those involved in some cases to escape scrutiny. They said often the coroner already holds back some of the most sensitive photos and information.

The legislation still allows access by law enforcement, defense teams, social service agencies and state child death review teams.

John Albert Gardner earlier this year confessed to the crimes and is serving two life sentences without the possibility of parole.

In a separate bill signing, the governor set in motion a phaseout of copper in vehicle brake pads beginning in 10 years. Each time motorists apply the brakes, microscopic amounts of copper are shed. The particles are eventually washed by rain or other runoff into waterways and bays. The buildup threatens marine life and drinking water.

Sen. [Christine Kehoe](#), D-San Diego, hammered out the compromise plan over three years of negotiations.

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