



NW Sidebar

The Voices of Washington's Legal Community



Washington Rules to Make You Scream This Halloween: Completely Bizarre, but Totally Real Laws, Legislation, and Legal References

*October
31, 2019*



Elusive monsters, unfeeling extraterrestrials, dark arts and witchcraft—not exactly the types of things you tend to associate with the legal world ... unless, of course, you're talking about opposing counsel.

Typically though, the spooky, the ghoulish, the otherworldly are topics better reserved for the pages of *Harry Potter* than rolls of Revised Code of Washington (RCW). But for those brave enough to peer through state and local law, spine-chilling statutes lurk within those dark, foreboding places far below the subsections, buried within the municipal code, and deep in the docket.

Here is a sampling of some of the most strange, the most supernatural, the most startling, spooky, and scary from Washington's legal history—past; present; and, perhaps, far beyond.

Happy Halloween!

So Many Sasquatch

Sasquatch? Sasquatches? Sasquatchs? Whatever the plural for the Pacific Northwest's mythological monster in residence, the infamous hulking woodland ape certainly makes a lot of appearances in our laws.

Potecting Sasquatch: In Skamamia County, Sasquatch are to be seen and not shot. A 1969 county ordinance declared that it was not only frowned upon to kill Bigfoot, but a felony punishable by a \$10,000 fine or up to five years in county jail.

“WHEREAS, there is evidence to indicate the possible existence in Skamamia County of a nocturnal primate mammal variously described as an ape-like creature or a sub-species of Homo Sapien,” reads [Ordinance 69-01](#) in justification of the penalty, “and WHEREAS, both legend and purported recent sightings and spoor support this possibility”

Don't worry, 15 years later the Skamamia Board of Commissioners came to its collective senses and amended the almost absurdly steep penalty. As adopted in [Ordinance 1984-2](#), it's now only a \$500 fine and up to six months in jail for misdemeanor Sasquatch slaying, and \$1,000 or a year in the slammer for a gross misdemeanor “with malice aforethought.”

Sasquatch in Supreme Court: Bigfoot even got a shoutout in a Washington Supreme Court case; in *Ferry County v. Concerned Friends of Ferry County and Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board*, which centered on disputed environmental review of protected species using “the best available science.” From the dissenting opinion when the case was with the Washington State Court of Appeals, Division III:

“The result is analogous to requiring designation of critical habitat for the sasquatch, a species which the county and its biologist expert could not prove is not present. Repeated reports of sasquatch sightings do not, in my view, constitute ‘best available science’ nor

require counties to hire expensive experts to disprove its presence. As further noted below, this case is more extreme. Unlike the sasquatch, several of these supposed endangered species have no reported sightings in Ferry County.”

The Official Sasquatch: This will seriously be the last mention of Sasquatch in this article—but given Washington’s legal and legislative history with the creature, the subject is likely far from closed.

As recently as 2018, the state Senate tried to make Sasquatch the official, probably-definitely-maybe-real animal of Washington. Originally introduced in 2017, SB 5816 sought to designate Sasquatch as the “official cryptid or crypto-animal of Washington.” What’s a cryptid, you ask? *Merriam-Webster* defines it as “an animal (such as Sasquatch or the Loch Ness Monster) that has been claimed to exist but never proven to exist.”

Like the confirmed existence of Sasquatch, the official designation remains unresolved after the bill died in committee in early 2018. On Jan. 1, 2019, however, the state adopted, among others, a Sasquatch “special license plate” that, “recognizes the importance of Sasquatch in history and folklore, and supports the maintenance and improvements of Washington state parks.”

UFOs, but Not on the Down-Low

As a state that’s seemingly always ahead of the curve, Washington government officials were talking about UFOs and flying saucers publicly even before the blowout *New York Times* article “Glowing Auras and ‘Black Money’: The Pentagon’s Mysterious U.F.O. Program.” (For more about that topic and UFO research, read our profile and interview with Michael W. Hall, “The Paranormal Lawyer.”)

Here, you can even find video of Washington legislators speaking about “men in black” and flying saucers on YouTube—right out in the open. In 2017, the state passed Senate Resolution 8648, which acknowledged the 70th anniversary of the “Maury Island Incident” of 1947 and the “Summer of Saucers”:

“WHEREAS, On June 21, 1947, Tacoma resident Harold Dahl and his son allegedly sighted six flying discs over Puget Sound near Vashon Maury Island, an event now commonly known as ‘The Maury Island Incident’; and WHEREAS, On June 22, 1947, Mr. Dahl alleges he was warned not to talk about what he saw by a man dressed in a black suit; and WHEREAS, On June 24, 1947, pilot Kenneth Arnold alleges he saw nine unidentified flying objects (‘UFO’s’) near Mt. Rainier; and WHEREAS, These controversial sightings helped launch a pop 10

culture phenomenon of UFO sightings across the United States during the summer of 1947, which became known as ‘The Summer of the Saucers’”

Witchcraft and Wizardry School Bans

Professor McGonagall certainly wouldn’t take kindly to the state Senate’s 1989 bill that would require parental notification of classroom subjects, and even give parents the right to curriculum review. SB 5530 proposed that Washington school districts notify parents and guardians about certain topics including “the occult, witchcraft, hypnosis” Any objecting parents would have been permitted to pull their children from such dark-arts education, as well as excuse them from other topics like “astrology, Eastern mysticism and yoga; (6) sensitivity training and self- evaluation”

Though Washington’s bill tracking only goes back as far as 1991, SB 5530 doesn’t appear to have escaped its Feb. 1, 1989, Senate Committee on Education hearing.

Hidden Hypnosis

If your parents didn’t pull you out of hypnotism studies in school, you still have to be secretive about where you practice your craft if you’re in Everett. Under the Everett Municipal Code, violators can be fined as much as \$500 or jailed for up to six months—that’s on par with Sasquatch hunting—for publicly displaying a hypnotized subject:

“It is unlawful for any hypnotist or mesmerist, or other person, to exhibit or display, or permit to be exhibited or displayed, any subject of any hypnotist or mesmerist, or any person while under the influence of or alleged influence of hypnotism or mesmerism, in any window or public place outside of the hall or theater where such hypnotist or mesmerist is giving his entertainment or exhibition.”

If you want to look it up, the “hypnotism” section of the city’s municipal code can be found right before “smoking on buses” and right after “discrimination in housing.”

Human Composting

Washington: a state so militant about its refuse that composting requirements can follow you to your death—literally, if you’d like.

This last item is hardly a secret, as Washington made national news for being the first state in the nation to permit alkaline hydrolysis, aka liquid cremation; and natural organic reduction, aka human composting. [SB 5001](#), amends the RCW on “cemeteries, morgues, and human remains” to include:

“Alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction are added as allowable reduction methods for handling deceased persons’ bodies for their disposition. Alkaline hydrolysis is the reduction of human remains to bone fragments and essential elements in a licensed hydrolysis facility using heat, pressure, water, and base chemical agents. Natural organic reduction is the contained, accelerated conversion of human remains to soil.”

The bill easily cleared both state houses (80-16 in the House of Representatives and 38-11 in the Senate) to land on Gov. Jay Inslee’s desk, which he signed May 21 of this year, one year before the rule goes into effect in May 2020.

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