

Candy Warden, President
Rosa Bonheur Society
Woodstock, MD 21163
March 27, 2023

HB 0676 Testimony: FAVORABLE

Chair Melony Griffith and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Candy Warden. I am President of the Rosa Bonheur Society, a volunteer, nonprofit group formed to protect Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park, a Maryland pet cemetery. HB 676 is needed. Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park is only one of the Maryland pet cemeteries that is imperiled by the lack of legislation and regulation.

There are at least three other historic Maryland pet cemeteries that are imperiled due to the lack of pet cemetery legislation and regulation: Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park founded in 1935 by Edmund Gross, Aspin Hill founded in 1920 by Richard and Bertha Birney, and Oakleigh Pet Cemetery founded in the 1930s by Alvin Seitz.

ELEMENTS:

Financial Investments – It costs approximately \$4,400.00 to bury one pet, which does not include perpetual care fees. These investments are vulnerable without regulation by the Cemetery Oversight Commission.

Ordinance(s) and Covenant(s) Compliance – People seek pet cemeteries and commit their resources to provide respectful, traditional resting places for their deceased loved pets in pet cemeteries. They need helpful regulations to protect the pet industry’s commitment to honor representations made for final resting places for their cherished pets.

Religious, Social, and Ethical Values – Marylanders are a diverse group whose personal belief systems need to be acknowledged and supported by State and County Government. Our diversity is our strength, so it is with respect toward those who have buried their loved ones in pet cemeteries in accordance with their religious, social, and ethical beliefs that legislation for the regulation of pet cemeteries is long overdue.

DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE PETS?

Percentage of People with Pets - 90.5 million or 70% of American households (American Pet Products Assoc., 2022).

Members of Family – 95% of people worldwide consider their pets members of the family (Human Animal Bond Research Initiative Survey, 2022).

Christmas Gifts - 94% of American purchase holiday gifts for their pets (Online Pet Retailers Survey, People Magazine, Nov. 22, 2022).

DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE HUMAN – ANIMAL BOND?

87% of pet owners have experienced the mental health and/or physical health benefits of the human-animal bond.

98% of pet owners reported at least one specific benefit to their health from their pets including increased happiness, reduced loneliness, and decreased stress. (Human-Animal Bond Research Initiative Survey, 2022)

PRESERVATION.

A connection to the past through one of the strongest universal, enduring, and timeless bonds that humans have is a shared love and appreciation of pets. Therefore, legislation and regulation of pet cemeteries is essential for the humanization and preservation of this relationship.

WHAT IS THE COST OF NOT ENACTING HB676?

Fiscal Resources and Time Invested by:

1. Elected Government Officials, Government Departments (e.g., Departments of Planning and Zoning, Consumer Affairs and Protection Offices).
2. National, State, and County Organizations – Animal Organizations (e.g., SPCA Animal Advocates), Cemetery Organizations (e.g., Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites, Rosa Bonheur Society, Save Oakleigh Pet Cemetery), etc.
3. People who contact many others reporting the lack of State support to prevent the exploitation of Citizens by unscrupulous pet cemetery operators that provide burial plots, services, and goods at their whim, misappropriate perpetual care funds, and/or later sell the cemetery property to other individual(s) for purposes other than operating a pet cemetery.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF PET CEMETERY REGULATION?

1. Pet Cemetery Legislation would increase trust in the legitimacy and permanency of pet cemeteries, increase growth of pet cemetery industry, and increase sales of vaults, memorial markers, caskets etc.
2. The economy would benefit by increased numbers of pet burials, the purchase of more grave goods, the creation of more jobs, and increases in taxes paid.
3. Also, those pet cemetery operators that decide to embrace the even more lucrative practice of including human burials in their cemeteries would be legislatively regulated. Currently such cemeteries are referred to as “pet cemeteries”,

which suggests bare minimum compliance to the laws regulating human burials and provide no regulation and protection whatsoever for the pets and/or the cemetery property in which they rest. Therefore, these pet cemeteries as all pet cemeteries are vulnerable to self interested individuals that would desecrate and destroy them.

CONCLUSION.

Pet cemetery legislation has the potential to bring peace and closure to many, many people and permit them to dedicate their energies toward more positive aspects of life that could only build a better Maryland. The burdens placed on State, Counties', and communities' resources would also be lessened, so that those limited resources could be directed toward other issues.

It is time for legislation to end this unconscionable situation, which so out of step with the image that Maryland is a modern, caring state that supports and values its citizens.

Thank you for your attention, and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Candy Warden, President
Rosa Bonheur Society (founded May 2007)
2010 Periwinkle Award Winner, Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites