

Candy Warden, President
Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc.
10240 Harvest Fields Drive
Woodstock, MD 22163
January 30, 2024

HB 0593 Testimony: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

Sponsors: Delegates Hutchinson, Adams, Hartman, Sample-Hughes, and Schmidt,

My name is Candy Warden. I am President of the Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc., a volunteer, nonprofit group formed to protect the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park, a Maryland human and pet cemetery with thousands of burials. The people with loved ones resting at our cemetery span across all the counties of Maryland.

Constituents in every jurisdiction are aghast at what happened at just one cemetery. It is happening at other cemeteries all over Maryland. Just LAST MONTH, the week before Christmas, the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park suffered catastrophic removal and desecration of human and pet remains from multiple sites. These sites are owned by deed holders who invested in perpetual care. Heavy equipment damage in numerous locations. A backhoe dug up graves! Removed and plowed under human and pet remains, damaged memorial markers, and grave goods! Where are the remains!

More must be done immediately. More must be done in addition to extending the statute of limitations as proposed in HB 0593.

Stronger penalties must be enacted to deter the increasing disregard for the respect and honor of cemeteries and cemetery remains. Those causing damage must pay for ALL the damage and consequences of abhorrent misbehavior. Damages must include all proper procedures for interment, damage to markers, damage to cemetery grounds, administrative costs incurred by the Office of Cemetery Oversight, and ongoing costs of new protections.

Remains interred in a cemetery must at all times be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. These beliefs are normative and widely held by Constituents across Maryland. Cemetery legislation is critical to protect all Maryland gravesites.

HB 593 provides for increasing the statute of limitations for prosecutions relating to destroying funerary objects and others structures in a cemetery; and generally relating to the statute of limitations for the crime of destroying funerary objects.

REQUESTED AMENDMENT – Please amend HB 0593 by an Amendment adding the following words to Section 10-404: (iii) “the damage of cemetery landscaping and grounds”.

This amendment would serve to strength and expand the scope and impact of the overall bill by providing needed words that would address damage experienced by cemeteries and deed holders throughout Maryland..

At the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park graves were desecrated with human remains being exhumed and relocated without the permission of families and without the direction of a funeral services professional. Pet graves were also wantonly destroyed that surrounded the human graves.

The families that suffered disinterment(s) have also never been informed of the location of their loved ones’ remains by the desecrator(s). Are the human remains still extant? Have they been dumped in a mass grave somewhere? Have they been thrown away? Were the remains only partially exhumed or churned into the ground? Only the desecrator(s) know the answers to these questions.

Although families paid significant amounts of money for plots, caskets, vaults, memorial markers, and other services for human and pet burials and received deeds for their plots they have been victimized by their loved ones being violated.

Adopting the above Amendment, HB 0583 would provide legal protections for families and their diverse social, cultural, ethical, and religious beliefs and how they choose to honor their dead. With the adoption of the Amendment HB 0583 would offer broader protections and crucial reinforcement to the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

Candy Warden

Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc. (founded May 2007)

2010 Periwinkle Award Winner, Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites