

THOMAS S. HUTCHINSON
Legislative District 37B
Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot,
and Wicomico Counties



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 308
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3582 · 301-858-3582
800-492-7122 Ext. 3582
Tom.Hutchinson@house.state.md.us

Health and Government Operations
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB593 Criminal Law - Destroying Funerary Objects - Statute of Limitations

Judiciary Committee

Tuesday, February 13, 2024

Why We Need This Bill

Many families in the state of Maryland bury their deceased loved ones on the property of their homes. When these homes are sold, new homeowners do not always maintain these graves or cemeteries, and sometimes they will damage the graves without the previous family's knowledge. When families return to visit these sites, they discover the losses and try to seek justice for the desecration. However, *they can only seek legal action if the desecration occurred within the previous year*. Current Maryland law notes that the statute of limitations period starts when the violation is **committed**, not when it is **discovered**, per the Assistant AG's opinion.

HB 593 will extend the statute of limitations for the removal, desecration, damage, or destruction of funerary objects from **one year to five years when discovered**. While this was intended to help family or private cemeteries and burial sites, it does provide this new benefit to public cemeteries or burial sites. Instead of only having one year to discover the damages and to prosecute, families will have more time to seek legal action for funerary object desecration that happened on their old family property, and cemetery owners will have more time to investigate cases of cemetery desecration or destruction.

Too many families have found the bodies of their loved ones removed, their gravestones damaged or destroyed, and the grounds on which they rest ruined beyond recognition. Cemetery owners are being left with costly damages and desecrations to the grounds in which people have gone to mourn for their lost loved ones. It's imperative that we hold desecrators accountable for these unholy acts and that we protect the bodies of those that rest.

I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable vote, with amendments, on **HB 593**.