

HB0509/SB0354-Maryland Inventory of Cemeteries and Burial Sites Workgroup-Establishment-FAV

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I work with a large diverse group of cemetery advocates and am on boards of both the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society and the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites. I work closely with Anne Arundel County's Cultural Resources to assure that they have cemetery locations to protect them from future development. I helped re-inventory many of those cemeteries several years ago.

There is no standardization or sharing of information. Large central Maryland counties have databases but there is no central depository. The Office of Cemetery Oversight, Maryland Historical Trust, and the State Highway Administration each have their own databases. Many Maryland counties have limited information, sometimes only from well-known or easily accessible cemeteries but not from neglected cemeteries, churches, African American cemeteries, or cemeteries on federal lands.

Several years ago, the Baltimore County Genealogical Society created a database documenting their cemeteries. That concept could be used throughout Maryland. Some basic information is already available on the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Burial Sites' website. I helped develop much of this information from public sources. Documenting these sites would allow others (developers, historical researchers, genealogists, title researchers, and disaster planners) access to the records. Each county government could modify the database for their specific needs. This would prevent development where there is no record of a cemetery's existence. One issue which would need to be addressed would be how to document cemeteries on private property whose owners are resistant to information being available to the public. The workgroup would focus on such issues.

I live in a county with some of the earliest cemeteries in the country including the oldest known tombstones in Maryland. Sometimes cemeteries allow us to research the only record of founders of our communities. We need to preserve this heritage and make it easier for cemeteries to be protected. Community engagement, tourism promotion, and historical significance could all benefit from this legislature.

Thank you for your time. I'm available to answer any questions. I look forward to a favorable request of this bill.