

Formal Testimony: HB 564

TO: Madame Chair Heather Bagnall, Vice Chair Bonnie Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Joy Schoonover

POSITION: Favorable (FAV)

RE: HB 564 – Pet Cremation and Burial Services Consumer Protection Act

DATE: February 16, 2026

Good afternoon, Madame Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee. My name is Joy Schoonover, and I am here today to urge a favorable report on House Bill 564. Currently, Maryland law treats pet remains with less oversight than a used car sale. This lack of accountability creates an environment where families, already on an emotional "rollercoaster" of grief, are left vulnerable to exploitation. I know this trauma firsthand because of what happened to my beloved 17-year-old cat, Garfield.

After entrusting Garfield to a cremation service, I was given a box that did not contain my "sweet baby"—it was filled with concrete and sand particles. It was only through a police investigation that I learned the truth: Garfield's remains were found by police stuffed in the back of a hearse, where he was one of 38 pets discovered during their search.

HB 564 is a critical step to mandate basic human decency by requiring:

- Chain of Custody: Mandating a documented chain of custody and a written certificate detailing the cremation date to confirm services were performed as represented.
- Consumer Rights: Requiring honest, clear definitions of services—distinguishing between private, individual-partitioned, and communal cremation.
- Professional Accountability: Classifying violations as unfair or deceptive trade practices, giving the state power to hold unethical providers accountable.

Garfield was not "property"; he was a family member. No other pet owner should have to learn from a police search that their beloved companion was treated like trash. HB 564 ensures that Maryland's pet cremation providers are held to a standard of transparency and respect our companions deserve.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report on HB 564. Thank you.