



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 11, 2021

**Testimony of Senator Hayes in Support of Senate Bill 784: State Anatomy Board - Claimed Cremated Remains - Provision Without Payment of Costs**

Chairwoman Kelley and Fellow Members of the Finance Committee,

Everyone deserves the right to honor the memory of their loved ones, as well as the right to be laid to rest in accordance with their wishes. However, for families living in poverty or experiencing hardship, this becomes difficult due to fees associated with cremation. Especially if a death is unexpected, being able to cover the cost of a cremation can take an immense toll on families.

**SB 784** would require the State Anatomy Board to provide cremated remains to a relative at no cost if the relative can prove financial hardship. By eliminating these fees, this bill ensures that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, will be able to lay their loved ones to rest.

When a body is not claimed within 72 hours of death, the remains become the property of the State. Unclaimed bodies are often donated to science - meaning they are dissected, studied, and experimented on in various ways. As a result, the bodies of individuals whose families are unable to pay the steep fees for funeral services are used for the benefit of medical science regardless of the wishes of the individual or their families.

After these bodies are done being studied, they are cremated and their ashes are buried in an unmarked mass grave with thousands of other remains - further robbing the deceased of their honor and dignity and their families of a proper place to mourn and remember their loved one. This disproportionately occurs to the most vulnerable people in our society, such as people experiencing poverty, homelessness and/or those who struggled with mental health issues or drug addiction.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, more families are experiencing financial insecurity than ever before. As funeral costs continue to rise, we have an opportunity to alleviate one of the many financial stresses that are affecting people who have lost a loved one.

This bill ensures that everyone can honor the memory of their loved ones, no matter their financial status. It seeks to honor the principles of equity and bodily autonomy, and protect the interests of our most vulnerable constituents. Through eliminating the fees for cremation for those experiencing hardship, **SB 784** will allow everyone to mourn their loved ones while not having to worry about excessive costs.

**For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report on SB 784.**

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Antonio L. Hayes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Senator Antonio L. Hayes  
40<sup>th</sup> Legislative District - MD