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February 23rd, 2024

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland House of Delegates,

I am reaching out to express my firm opposition to the proposed bills, HB-1374 – AN ACT concerning Environment – Crematory – Setback Requirements and Permits. I wish to have this letter entered as testimony on my behalf.

As the owner of funeral homes and crematories in Maryland, I am deeply concerned about the potential negative impact of this legislation on our ability to provide dignified death care services to families across the state. The provisions outlined in these bills, particularly the proposed prohibition on locating new crematories within 1,000 feet of certain properties such as assisted living facilities, properties serving children, and residential properties, are unnecessary and could have far-reaching consequences for our industry.

Many funeral homes, like mine, have been family-owned and operated for generations, becoming integral parts of the community's history and culture. Funeral homes play a vital role in the social, cultural, and emotional well-being of the communities they serve, earning them a place of significance and respect. These bills would push future funeral homes further outside of the communities they are trying to serve. A crematory within a funeral home offers several practical, logistical advantages, enhancing the overall service and provides a comforting experience to the families.

While I understand the desire to address concerns about proximity to sensitive properties, I believe these restrictions are based on misconceptions and lack of scientific evidence to warrant such regulations. Implementing such restrictive setback requirements would severely limit communities' ability to establish new crematories, potentially forcing families to travel longer distances, increasing costs, and adding even more emotional strain for families.

Moreover, these setback requirements might be perceived as discriminatory toward the funeral and crematory sector. Cremation stands as a crucial facet of end-of-life care, favored by numerous Maryland residents. If our concern is truly about health and the environment, why not target home furnaces, vehicles, trucks, factories, restaurants, and any other sources emitting exhaust? We operate under full government regulation and scrutiny. We self-test, our manufacturers test, and the state tests our crematories on a regular basis. If there were genuine health concerns, wouldn't inspectors or health professionals have uncovered them by now? Should my employees and other crematory operators be worried? The crux of the matter is this: perhaps some individuals fear death and prefer not to reside or work near funeral homes or crematories. Due to those fears, health impacts are being used as a pretext. Some individuals are uncomfortable with death and the proximity to these establishments doesn't give them the right to control what any owner can do on a properly zoned property.

Furthermore, the scientific basis for mandating these setback distances is questionable at best. There is no conclusive evidence suggesting that crematories pose significant environmental or health risks to nearby properties, considering that we operate under established safety and emissions standards. Enforcing arbitrary setback requirements could create unnecessary barriers for businesses and communities looking to establish new crematories without providing tangible benefits.

In conclusion, I strongly urge you to oppose this bill and consider alternative approaches that strike a balance between community needs and the interests of the death care industry. Rather than imposing overly restrictive measures, I recommend focusing on existing regulations and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that crematories operate safely and responsibly while maintaining accessibility to essential services for all Maryland residents.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will consider my perspective and the concerns of other stakeholders when deliberating and voting on these two bills. Please contact me directly if you have any questions. If anyone would like to tour our crematory in Forest Hill, please do not hesitate to ask. Education is crucial in making an informed decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles F. Evans, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Charles F. Evans, Jr.

President