

SB963/HB535-Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund-Establishment and Income Tax Checkoff-FAV

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I am on the boards of the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society, the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites, and am a member of an ad hoc group of cemetery preservationists known as Maryland Cemetery Legislative Advocates who have over 300 years combined experience dealing with cemeteries and their issues.

Grant funding for historic homes, communities, and even roads is available but funding for cemeteries is almost non-existent. Funds are not available to individuals or non-profit groups who cannot provide proof of ownership. An abandoned cemetery automatically means there is no known current ownership.

Our budget neutral income tax checkoff would allow constituents interested in preservation of these cemeteries to contribute to a fund. Our research has shown that, given choices, people are more apt to choose an option if given a larger number of choices. This is contrary to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's claims that five choices for a checkoff are the maximum that are beneficial. This would also likely to bring more attention to the issue of abandoned and neglected cemeteries and increase public awareness for funding from other sources. Interest earned by this fund would increase our ability to assist in future maintenance and preservation. We believe having a fund to assist these cemeteries is necessary.

Abandoned and neglected cemeteries are a blight on all communities. With no ownership or owner oversight and interest, cemeteries easily become the target for senseless vandalism and criminal activity. The purpose of this fund is to provide for the care, maintenance, and restoration of these cemeteries.

Thank you for your interest and look forward in your positive support of this legislation.