



Senate Finance Committee    Hearing on SB1021    Hearing Date: March 11, 2025

**CPMBS position: FAV**

**Business Regulation - Cemeteries - Requirements for Sale or Transfer or Government Acquisition**

The Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites is an all-volunteer nonprofit that since 1992 has advocated for improvement in distressful cemetery situations that occur across Maryland and for needed changes in state law. In 2021-2, I served on the committee that was charged by House and Senate Joint Chairmen to survey citizens and study historic African American cemeteries and recommend strategies to bolster current situations. Not surprisingly, the published JCR report encouraged strengthening Maryland law to better protect all cemeteries and assist those groups who strive to improve their futures. A major recommendation in that report was helping to address ownership and title issues for abandoned and neglected cemeteries. [www.cpmbs.org](http://www.cpmbs.org) has a link to the report on our Home Page.

Every Maryland county and municipality has identified vulnerable burial sites within their borders that require protection; African American cemeteries are over-represented in the numbers of abandoned and un-maintained sites today. One of the most common problems of all cemeteries is unknown ownership; without proven, recorded ownership, it is impossible to take steps to resolve problems or even to organize a clean-up, be officially recognized, or apply for a grant. Now is the time to recognize these deplorable situations and pledge to address them, with the assistance of nonprofit organizations and descendant communities.

**CPMBS particularly calls the Committee's attention to Section 5-507 A, B, and C**, which defines conditions under which a cemetery can be labeled "abandoned." Most importantly, it sets out a clear path by which an interested government entity may intervene in a downward spiral through the voluntary process of taking title for a finite time and finding an appropriate new owner to take over this responsibility. Note that this bill ENABLES our State, a County or a Municipality to acquire an abandoned cemetery for this purpose, should it wish to do so; local governments are not required to facilitate this link to new ownership and long-term improved stewardship, but we know some of them will take advantage of this opportunity to resolve local problems.

Passage of SB1021 with this option will respond to a high priority need for many jurisdictions.

In addition, SB1021 provides much-needed assurances to those concerned about neglected cemeteries facing sale for a new use. Descendant communities, lot owners, neighbors, and dedicated nonprofits will all benefit from the proposed increased requirements for public notice, assemblage of information, and a preservation plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

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