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HB711/SB671-FAV-Office of Cemetery Oversight-Study of Deathcare and Funeral Home Practices-FWA

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I believe the entire subject of deathcare and funeral practices is due for a review since there have been so many changes in this industry within this century. The majority of individuals are no longer buried intact or buried in private family cemeteries on their homesteads. There is a whole range of options, but most deceased and families of the deceased have opted for cremations. Laws regarding air and ground water pollution are much more stringent than they were 50 years ago.

I have been researching cemeteries and those buried in them for 40 years for the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society. This enables people researching their family histories to more easily identify where to search for information on their ancestors. Very few obituaries or death certificates in recent times include information on the final disposition of the deceased. Making this even more difficult is the fact that there is no requirement for funeral homes to hold onto their records. I know of a funeral home that only saves their records for two years. There is no requirement for funeral homes, more of whom are going out of business these days, to send their records to a repository such as the Maryland State Archives. There is a general response by many funeral homes that their records cannot be viewed by non-relatives due to "privacy" issues. That same information is already available on public death certificates. Restrictions can easily be included that the records cannot be viewed for a given amount of time, the same as is currently required for death certificates.

Funeral homes, health departments, and state attorneys' offices are all required to sign off on permits for burials as well as to disinter and reinter bodies or even whole cemeteries yet there is no process on who holds those permits after this has been accomplished. If a body is moved from one location to another, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to locate the final location.

Another item that should be addressed is whether there have been any significant changes to the way the military interacts with local funeral homes when the deceased will not be buried in a military cemetery. Are those records retained by the military, the funeral home or both and who has access to those records?

I believe these are also important issues that need to be evaluated. Times change, customs change, and the physical landscape where these remains are placed all need to be re-evaluated.

I look forward to your support of this bill.