

Morticians and Funeral Directors - Not-For-Profit Funeral Establishments

HB1051, Health and Government Operations Committee Hearing, 10 March 2025

Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, Delegates,

My name is Gidon van Emden. From my great-great-grandmother down, my family has been involved in their Jewish community's funeral practices. I continue that tradition as Chair of my synagogue's Funeral Practices Committee. I am involved with the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington. And I serve as a Consumer Member of the Maryland Board of Morticians. I am here today, however, strictly in my personal capacity, to advocate for HB1051.

Not-for-profit funeral homes already exist legally and safely in almost 20 states. Moreover, we have not-for-profits in almost all sectors in Maryland: hospitals and schools, but also [cemeteries](#), [veterinary clinics](#), [farms](#), [caterers](#), [bakeries](#), and more. These operate just like their for-profit equivalents, and uniquely contribute to our society.

The proposed bill is brief and simple: it changes the law to allow for not-for-profit funeral homes in our great State of Maryland.

Over the past months, in discussing this issue with many Marylanders, most simply asked: "Are they not legal now? Why not?"

Starting a funeral establishment in Maryland is onerous, and it must be owned wholly by licensed Funeral Directors or Morticians. This requirement excludes not-for-profits - even as the law allows a grandfathered exception for 56 corporate licenses.

What this bill proposes, is to simply allow a not-for-profit entity to apply for a new corporate license. It has to fulfill all the other requirements. It has to pass an inspection, appoint a Supervisory Mortician, and ensure that all matters that require it, are handled by a licensed professional. The only difference is that this funeral establishment would be ultimately responsible to a Board of Directors rather than to shareholders.

[This would allow religious groups to better manage their members' deaths according to their traditions. It would also allow smaller communities in our state to continue honoring their own dead locally, even when a local funeral home owner retires.]

In discussing this bill with Jewish, Muslim, African-American and other community leaders, I was often told that they would like to support this bill, but are afraid to do so because it might upend their current relationship with a funeral home. The fact that folks are so concerned about retaliation that they fear speaking out, is living proof that we need this bill.

This bill proposes to carefully create the opportunity for not-for-profit establishments to make a significant difference. This bill, which will cost nothing to implement, can help Marylanders save money at a time when everything is getting more expensive.

I ask the committee to report favorably on this bill.