



Subject: Support for Bill HB1051 (to Allow Not-for-Profit Funeral Homes in Maryland)

Dear Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair, Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee,

I am writing today to petition your support for the proposed bill that seeks to change current Maryland law and allow for the establishment of not-for-profit funeral homes in our state. This straightforward and modest change will have a profound impact on the affordability, accessibility, and dignity of funeral services in Maryland, while also respecting the diverse cultural and religious needs of our communities.

As many of you are aware, the cost of funerals in Maryland is among the highest in the nation, placing an additional burden on families at a time when they are already grieving the loss of a loved one. The economic impact is especially felt by communities who wish to maintain their own traditions and practices, often simpler and more modest than what is provided by for-profit funeral homes. This bill offers a solution that can lower funeral costs while ensuring the same high standards of safety, care, and professionalism.

Lower Costs with Little Risk

The average cost of a funeral in Maryland can be overwhelming, with expenses often reaching thousands of dollars. By allowing not-for-profit funeral homes, we introduce competition and affordability into a market currently dominated by for-profit entities. Not-for-profits are beholden only to their communities, not shareholders, which allows them to prioritize the needs of Maryland families over profits. These organizations aim to operate sustainably but are not driven by the need to generate profits for owners or investors. This means that Marylanders will have access to more affordable services during an incredibly difficult time.

The implementation of this law would cost the state nothing. This is not a proposal to increase the burden on taxpayers, but rather a solution that empowers local communities to maintain funeral homes that are aligned with their values. Additionally, it supports the ethos of certain religious communities, such as Jewish and Muslim groups, who prefer to keep funeral rites simple and modest, adhering to their faith traditions.

Respect for Communities

This bill will allow local and religious communities to take charge of their own funeral needs, without being entirely dependent on for-profit entities. By giving communities the option to run funeral homes as not-for-profits, we enable them to offer services that respect their cultural and religious beliefs. For



example, many religious traditions emphasize swift and modest burials, often using plain materials and avoiding unnecessary embellishments. Not-for-profit funeral homes could be specifically tailored to meet these needs.

It is worth noting that not-for-profit organizations already exist and thrive in many sectors in Maryland. From hospitals to schools, from religious organizations to cemeteries, these entities are held to the same regulatory and safety standards as their for-profit counterparts. There is no reason why funeral homes should be treated any differently.

Safety First

Under this proposed bill, safety and professionalism will remain paramount. Just as not-for-profit hospitals, schools, and other organizations are required to meet stringent health and safety regulations, so too will not-for-profit funeral homes. Qualified not-for-profits would still need to obtain the same licensing as for-profit funeral homes, ensuring that the highest standards of care and professionalism are upheld. Licensed funeral directors and morticians will oversee and execute services, maintaining the same level of expertise required in the industry today.

Addressing an Unfair Barrier

Currently, under Maryland law, funeral home permits can only be issued to licensed funeral directors or morticians, and they must be organized as a professional association, with complete ownership of the establishment. This regulation effectively shuts out not-for-profit entities, despite the fact that they are legal and well-regulated in nearly 20 states across the nation. The argument has been made that this is an unnecessary barrier, limiting competition and leaving families with fewer options for affordable funeral services.

This bill is not an attempt to change the status quo for current funeral directors; rather, it is about providing additional options for Marylanders who wish to explore more affordable and community-driven alternatives. It is about giving families the ability to make choices that best reflect their values and needs at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you to support the proposed bill to allow for not-for-profit funeral homes in Maryland. This legislation will help reduce the financial burden on families, respect the cultural and religious practices of our diverse communities, and ensure that funeral services continue to be safe, professional, and accessible to all Marylanders.



The bill is simple, it is cost-neutral to the state, and it offers much-needed relief to those who face the rising costs of funerals. I hope you will consider the lasting benefits of this legislation and give it your full support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Imam Yaseen Shaikh

Imam, Lead Resident Scholar & Head of Community Affairs
Islamic Society of Baltimore