

HB535 Testimony of David Zinner for the House Health and Government Operations Committee - Feb 18, 2025

I'm David Zinner, Coordinator for the Maryland Cemetery Legislative Advocates (MCLA). Our group has extensive experience with cemetery issues.

I've been a member of the Maryland Advisory Council for Cemetery Oversight (ACCO) for 12 years though my testimony today is not as a representative of the Council.

For many years, from every county in Maryland, we've heard complaints, concern and anguish about the condition of abandoned and severely neglected cemeteries. Abandoned and neglected cemeteries can become an eyesore and show disrespect. They can become a burden for neighbors and municipalities.

This is not a new problem. In 2005 the ACCO received a recommendation from Legislative Services to study the issue of abandoned and neglected cemeteries with the intention of developing legislation to address the issue. In 2009 legislation was introduced, but not passed.

1. In HB535, the purpose of the fund is laid out. It is to provide for the care, preservation, maintenance, and restoration of abandoned and neglected cemeteries in the state.
2. The need is clear. Maryland has many abandoned and neglected cemeteries, many from religious groups or family cemeteries where there are only a few descendants caring for the cemeteries.
3. A fund will make a difference. It can provide direct assistance and it can also assist with long term planning for the preservation and care of abandoned and neglected cemeteries.
4. Last year HB0828 passed the house. This year's bill focuses on neglected cemeteries as well as abandoned cemeteries.

5. HB535 may not solve all of the extensive problems of neglected and abandoned cemeteries, but it will enable us to begin to address this issue on a statewide basis.
6. Some may say that there are too many charities in the tax checkoff. We would refer delegates to our fact sheet that lays out documented research showing that assertions of “too many” are incorrect.
7. Some may say about the income tax checkoff, “we were here first”. We say that allowing new charities to participate in the income tax checkoffs is an important way to assist new charities that meet Maryland state priorities.

We ask for your support of HB535.