

HB 535/SB963-Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund-Establishment and Income Tax Checkoff-FAV

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I have been working with a volunteer group of cemetery advocates weekly since July. We have over 300 years combined experience dealing with cemeteries and issues surrounding them. I am on the boards of both the Anne Arundel Genealogical Society and the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites.

Grant funding for historic homes and communities is fairly common but funding for cemeteries is almost non-existent. Funds are not available to individuals or non-profit groups who cannot provide knowledge of ownership. A budget neutral income tax checkoff would allow constituents who are interested in preservation of cemeteries to contribute to the fund. Our research has shown that, given choices, people are more apt to pick a choice if given a larger variety of options. This is likely to bring more attention to this issue and increase public awareness of the need for grant funding from other sources as well. The monetary interest earned by this fund would increase our ability to assist in even more future maintenance and preservation.

Abandoned and neglected cemeteries are a blight on all communities. With no ownership or owner oversight and interest, they can easily become the target for senseless vandalism and criminal activity. The purpose of this fund is to provide for the care, maintenance, and restoration of these cemeteries.

I thank you for your interest and look forward in your positive support of this legislation.