

June 12, 2015

To Board Members:

We currently own two funeral homes in Rockville, Maryland and want to lodge a formal complaint against the entity:

Jewish Funeral Practices Committee (heretofore JFPC (www.jewish-funerals.org))

Our complaint is that the JFPC is portraying themselves to the public as a replacement for a funeral director. We will show in multiple examples how they communicate that working with a funeral director is both unnecessary and even dangerous. JFPC is a non-licensed religious group that promotes “their” funeral plan on their website and thru multiple temples and synagogues. In this process, they promote the concept of the family not having to go and deal with a funeral director. This passage comes directly from their website:

“The members of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee of Greater Washington (JFPCGW) are 40+ synagogues and other Jewish organizations that provides training and assistance for Chevra Kadisha groups and synagogue bereavement committees. The Committee provides education and resources, and negotiates and supervises contracts with two funeral homes - one serving Maryland-DC and one serving Northern Virginia and with a monument dealer.

The Committee also helps congregations protect the bereaved from commercial exploitation.

JFPCGW operates entirely with volunteers. Expenses are defrayed by \$100 annual dues paid by member congregations. Committee members stand ready to help congregations organize hevrai kadishot or bereavement committees, supply materials

One of the important practices advocated by JFPCGW is the active participation of congregation members. Synagogue funeral committees, by one name or another, may make themselves immediately available to visit and counsel the bereaved, obtain the needed information, and arrange and manage the funeral and burial. **The bereaved family does not have to do business directly with a funeral director”**

As you can see, they believe that the families should be shielded from the funeral director. We find the language they use to be offensive to all funeral directors in the United States.

We have several questions and general statements regarding their activities. Our concern is that many state and federal laws are not being upheld when dealing with these special contract families and especially when non-contract items are being added.

- a. Is the family receiving a GPL, CPL and OBCPL? Who is giving it to them and when?
- b. When is a proper contract (statement of funeral goods and services) signed and by who?
- c. Many funeral homes have special arrangements with religious groups and other institutions and meet directly with the families or legal representative. With the JFPC contract, it goes beyond a special arrangement, they are meeting with families, quoting funeral pricing all without having a license and without having any liability or responsibility to a family/consumer. These individuals are replacing the funeral director even though they have no license from your office. They are “quasi funeral directors” and have no respect or regards for licensed funeral professionals or the laws of Maryland.

d. Is it possible that at some point there will be no need for a funeral establishment because of groups like this- they seem to usurp the Board and FTC authority at every turn? The funeral home honoring the JFPC contract is complicit with a non-licensed entity by allowing the JFPC to act like a funeral director. Is the funeral home breaking any laws?

e. By allowing this group to exist, there are future issues for all funeral homes in Maryland, Jewish and non-Jewish. At what point do other religious groups within the State of Maryland do the same thing as JFPC? Can the Catholic Archdiocese or the Latter Day Saints as an example have the same representation with a group? What effect will other religious groups have on our State of Funeral Service when they do not follow Title 7? Look what has happened with the Rabbi in Pittsburgh who no longer needs a funeral director or funeral home to perform a funeral.

f. As stated in several of their publications to the public, JFPC is studying the need for a not for profit funeral home in Maryland. Their push for state legislative changes to make not for profit funeral homes a reality in Maryland would be detrimental to all funeral homes.

g. Regardless of who the JFPC is politically aligned with they should not be able to disregard the State Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors Board laws and authority which they have done for years.

h. Below are just a few samples of publications in the community where they are listed with the other funeral homes

In this guide you can see their ad on page 26 and their listing on page 29.

<http://digital.washingtonjewishweek.com/i/348755-guide-to-jewish-life-2014-2015>

When you do a google search for Jewish funeral home in Washington DC, they come up

<https://www.google.com/#q=Jewish+funeral+home+in+Washington+DC>

On this page from the Jewish Federation's Jconnect, they are listed with the funeral homes. If you are a consumer and read this listing, you are led to believe that you don't even need a funeral home.

<http://www.jconnect.org/resources/death-and-bereavement>

All of these advertisements are confusing to the public and misleading because they are grouped with the funeral homes and they lead people to believe that they don't need to meet with a funeral director that will, as they like to say, "Commercially exploit them".

Below is an example of a consumer that had a horrible experience when selecting to use the JFPC contract with Hines-Rinaldi and she ends up with absolutely no recourse with JFPC or any of the members.

Appearing in Washington Jewish Week September 17, 2014

I was disturbed to read Bob Hausman's defense of the Jewish Funeral Practices Committee contract with Hines-Rinaldi Funeral Home ("Jewish Funeral Practices Committee funerals protect the bereaved," WJW, Sept. 11) given my family's recent traumatic experience with that provider.

My father died late afternoon on Friday Aug. 15. My sister and I were left alone with his corpse for more than seven hours while Hines-Rinaldi refused to collect the body, saying that it was after their regular business hours. Its staff also refused to supply shomrim (people who watch over the body) until after Shabbat ended - some 28 hours since our father had died. We were told that shmira is a Jewish custom, not Jewish law, and therefore we were not guaranteed that service.

Instead of being accorded the comfort of knowing that we had given our father the dignity of the most basic Jewish funeral practices, well after midnight we were forced to accompany his body to the morgue in the hospital basement. Mr. Hausman writes that by using Hines-Rinaldi's services:

"Bereaved families ... know they've done the right, traditional thing, supported by the community, and they needn't suffer doubt." We were neither able to do the right, traditional thing nor to have any trust that our father would be accorded any Jewish death rites.

I want to alert local rabbis and their congregants to Hines-Rinaldi's disdain for our religious traditions. This funeral home does not deserve a monopoly on affordable Jewish funerals, a practice it flouts with impunity. My father was a Holocaust survivor who was fortunate enough to die of natural causes in old age. It pains me greatly to know that for his final journey I was unable to provide him with the proper Jewish death rituals that he merited, as do all our loved ones.

Edna Friedberg

Washington, DC

This contract and group should be eradicated since they are breaking the law and have had uninhibited carte blanche for years-and should be seen as a threat to funeral service in the State of Maryland. They are practicing funeral service in the State of Maryland without a license; we believe it is your responsibility to protect the public and licensed funeral directors by putting a stop to their operation.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edward Sagel and Albert Bloomfield

Licensed Funeral Establishment owners in the State of Maryland.