

Inventory -HB0509: Maryland Inventory of Cemeteries and Burial Sites Workgroup

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.

HB0509 establishes the Maryland Inventory of Cemeteries and Burial Sites Workgroup. Currently there are three Maryland State agencies that record cemetery information - the Office of Cemetery Oversight, the Maryland Historical Trust and the State Highway Administration. We believe that none of these sites capture all Maryland cemeteries, nor do they always include critical information such as GPS location or cemetery condition.

HB0509 addresses the significant need to catalog and maintain an up-to-date inventory of cemeteries and burial sites across the state. Such an inventory is crucial for preserving our cultural heritage, ensuring respectful handling of burial sites, and supporting historical and genealogical research.

This bill will create a dedicated workgroup composed of representatives from various state and local entities, historical organizations, and community members with expertise and perspectives necessary to create a comprehensive and accurate inventory. The workgroup will identify and review existing definitions, documentation practices, and inventory systems from other states. This will help establish best practices and overcome challenges in designing and maintaining Maryland's cemetery inventory system. The workgroup will also recommend data collection and maintenance categories, including a public search function to ensure that the inventory will be easily accessible to researchers, historians, and the general public, fostering transparency and engagement.

HB0509 mandates the workgroup to determine the costs involved in designing, implementing, and maintaining a statewide inventory system and to identify potential funding sources to support these efforts, ensuring financial sustainability.

Cemeteries and burial sites are invaluable historical resources that provide insights into our communities' cultural and social history. Creating an inventory ensures that these sites are documented, protected, and maintained for future generations.

HB0509 represents a significant step towards preserving Maryland's cultural and historical heritage. We strongly support HB0509 and urge its passage.