

HB 724/SB 631 Commission on Abandoned and Neglected Maryland Cemeteries-Establishment-FAV

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I have been working with a 15-member volunteer group of cemetery advocates. 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. I consult on many different types of cemetery issues.

There is no single state agency overseeing cemeteries. Usually, state agencies are not routinely involved unless there are issues with that cemetery. The Office of Cemetery Oversight deals with issues concerning operating commercial cemeteries. Maryland Historical Trust generally consults with those wishing to alter something at a cemetery such as adding fencing, removing dead trees, etc. The State Highway Administration deals with cemeteries that are located in the rights of way of current or proposed state-managed roadways. They all have different interests and abilities but none work with providing protections for all the cemeteries in Maryland.

Coordination with state and local jurisdictions would ensure that cemetery protections are in place or put in place and are appropriate. A commission would guarantee that cemeteries were included and updated into a standardized database and administered by the Abandoned and Neglected Cemeteries Fund.

The commission would be able to coordinate with Maryland's Department of Assessment and Taxation to assign tax account numbers to cemeteries, many of which are unlisted due to their tax-exempt status enabling persons with an interest to finally acquire ownership of abandoned cemeteries.

A commission could provide guidance and support to descendants and others as to how to properly maintain or improve conditions at cemeteries.

A commission would be able to identify and create management of a cemetery when necessary, purchase necessary equipment to assist with maintenance of abandoned cemeteries, and create certificate programs for pre-release incarcerated prisoners and others to obtain the necessary skills to find jobs.

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