



February 10, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SUBJECT: Support SB616: Criminal Law – Human Remains, Pet Remains and Cemeteries - Prohibitions

Good afternoon. My name is Mark Edwards, and I am a member of the Maryland Cemetery Legislative Advocates (MCLA) and a member of the Board of Directors of Montgomery Preservation, Inc. Before I retired 3 years ago, I worked for over 46 years in the heritage preservation and cultural resource management field, including 18 years at the Maryland Historical Trust. I reside in Silver Spring, Montgomery County, Maryland.

Following the 2024 Maryland General Assembly session, advocates involved with cemeteries began meeting to share information about problems and challenges, review existing law, and to agree upon priorities for legislative changes to propose to the 2025 General Assembly. The working group includes individuals active in cemetery preservation, care, and maintenance as well as descendants, genealogists, and nonprofit organizations. These initiatives follow the survey and study requested by the Joint Chairmen and reported to the Maryland General Assembly on June 30, 2022. See the *Report on Historic African American Cemeteries to the Chairmen of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and House Appropriations Committee* submitted on June 30, 2022, by the Maryland Commission on African American History & Culture and the Maryland Historical Trust.

SB616 is beneficial because it strengthens the protection of human and pet remains, as well as the sanctity of cemeteries, by expanding the definition of a permanent cemetery to include those owned by families or religious organizations. It establishes stricter prohibitions and graduated financial penalties deriving from, tampering with, desecrating, or damaging human and pet remains, funerary objects, landscaping, and cemetery structures. This should, in turn, result in a reduction in disrespectful or harmful actions within cemeteries. By addressing trafficking, mutilation, and improper storage or transportation of remains, the legislation also ensures that cemeteries remain places of reverence and respect. Perhaps most importantly this legislation upholds the dignity of burial sites and reinforces ethical standards for their preservation and maintenance.

For these reasons, I request that you support SB616. Thank you for your consideration of my request.

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