

Testimony House Bill 616

February 11, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Tammy Doring, and I want to thank you for allowing me this time to speak in support of HB 616.

You just heard Delegate Hutchinson describe the events that led me to contact him regarding the destruction of our family cemetery in Dorchester County.

On August 19, 2021, my mother, sister and I went to the property to visit the cemetery and found it completely demolished; it was pushed into a pile covered with weeds, vaults destroyed, opened, filled with water and headstones scattered into the marsh. It was a shocking sight to say the least.

We promptly sought assistance to address this egregious act. We reported the incident to the Dorchester County Sheriff's Department and obtained an opinion from the State's Attorney, Bill Jones. However, all our efforts were ultimately unproductive.

The answer was "the statute of limitations have been exceeded, there's nothing to be done."

Hearing there was nothing to be done when 22 souls' final resting place had been treated no better than garbage in a landfill was horrifying and was beyond unacceptable

I wanted to give you a little background on the family cemetery in Wingate, known in documents from Dorchester Genealogy Records as the Truitt Homeplace Cemetery, or the Tall-Truitt Cemetery. If any of you know that area, you know that it's very remote, a community of watermen. It is not unusual for homes there to have family cemeteries on their properties. This was my mother's childhood home where she lived with her parents and grandparents.

The first burial at the site dates back to 1857, Thomas H. Tall, and the last burial was my great-grandfather, Waylon H. Truitt in 1972 – as this was his home. He was laid to rest next to his wife Essie who passed in 1949. My great grandfather served in WWI in the army. I was fortunate to have a great-grandfather in my life and I remember going to his funeral and to that burial site when I was a child.

The cemetery is also the resting place of 6 children and infants.

The families who were buried in the Tall-Truitt Cemetery are not historically notable, they are not famous - but they are family; they are loved ones who were laid to rest in a place that was important to them. They deserve reverence and respect. And we, the family who remain, deserve to have a place to visit and to remember them. We should not have to fear these places of hallowed ground could ever be removed or destroyed in our absence.

On behalf of my mother, my sister and the Truitt and Tall families, I would ask you to vote favorably in support of HB 616. In passing this bill, you can ensure that no other family has to endure the pain and helplessness we felt upon discovering the desecration of our loved ones' final resting place. Your support will protect the sanctity and honor of all family cemeteries, ensuring that they remain places of peace and remembrance.

Thank you.