



House Judiciary Committee Hearing on HB616 Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

CPMBS position: FAV

The Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites was organized in 1992 by Marylanders distressed by the weak protections for cemeteries existing in the Maryland Code. Some protective legislation has been enacted in past decades, and now it is time to strengthen State laws and procedures. Current State law is insufficient and infrequently enforced at local levels to protect cemeteries from desecration, vandalism, neglect, and exploitation. Stronger State laws and uniform procedures, better documentation, public awareness, widespread information, and guidance are sorely needed. Several bills have been filed in this session.

CPMBS supports the concepts of HB616, to increase penalties and the statute of limitations for crimes such as desecration and vandalism in Maryland cemeteries. HB616 provides needed improvement to certain situations.

By extending the statute of limitations for prosecution of criminal violations, it improves the likelihood that descendants or other persons of interest will learn in time of damages or disenterments at sites where loved ones are buried. By aggressively following up and initiating contact with descendants, more prosecutions will be encouraged and end appropriately. By requiring restitution for damages and raising maximum fines, potential violators are less likely to take the risk of being caught. Changing the status of this offense from misdemeanor to felony will signal to criminals, law enforcement, and prosecutors that Maryland cares about its citizens who have lived, died, and are buried here.

The improvements outlined in HB616 provide greater protection for Maryland citizens, living and deceased. This bill acknowledges the limitations of previous laws and raises protections while providing more assurance to descendants and interested parties that tighter rules will result in better outcomes.

On behalf of our State-wide nonprofit organization, thank you for your consideration.

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