

House Health & Economic Matters Committees HB 893 Hearing February 25, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE Cross-filed with SB 234

Business Regulation -- Abandoned Cemeteries -- Acquisition and Disposition

Montgomery Preservation requests the committees' favorable reception of this very important bill. It provides a simple solution to the long-standing problem of Abandoned Cemeteries, a title that describes too many Maryland properties.

The most common cause of Abandonment is unknown ownership. Without proven, recorded ownership, it is impossible to take steps to resolve problems or to even organize a clean-up, be officially recognized, apply for a grant. I currently serve on the boards of two small historic cemeteries that were terribly neglected for decades; generous attorneys and determined descendants stepped up to sort out ownership and update land and tax records so maintenance and restoration could begin.

HB 893 provides a mechanism to enable transfer of title of abandoned cemeteries to Counties and Municipalities for eventual ownership by descendants or non-profit organizations who agree to preserve and maintain them. This law would enable -- not require -- government entities to assist when there is no owner to deal with.

Three real-life examples will serve to illustrate:

One is a cemetery in Washington County that was discovered by neighbors and volunteers, who have earned the admiration of many Marylanders. Alas, ownership is unclear so they can only go so far. The Friends group is willing and prepared to take over; what is missing is a pathway -- a legal mechanism -- for this group to take on ownership of Halfway Cemetery.

Another is in Montgomery County, where government could only go so far to assist descendants whose church cemetery was partly paved over by a public road. And another is Forest Hills Memorial Gardens in Clinton, for which SDAT acknowledges no owner.

New England towns are well known for taking responsibility for needy cemeteries. Fortunately, a few Maryland towns have taken over ownership and maintenance --- Chesterfield Cemetery in Centreville and Old Berlin Cemetery in Brunswick. Other states have tackled this problem. New York, South Carolina, and Georgia are three that authorize willing counties and municipalities to act to remedy situations where owners are not known or interested. Maryland jurisdictions need this option too!

Last May, after waiting in a long line to join Gov. Moore at bill-signing, our group of advocates reflected how much more citizen supporters and bi-partisan legislators have come to recognize the value of cemetery preservation to Marylanders everywhere. We are grateful to all of you for listening to us explain the importance, need, and impact of these 2026 bills.

Our group and many other advocates urge you to approve both bills. They will be welcomed by willing Marylanders who envision a future for these needy sites as they are matched with those who care about them. Thank you for your consideration.

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