



February 23, 2026

**TO:** Members of the House Economic Matters Committee

**SUBJECT: Support HB893: Business Regulation – Abandoned Cemeteries – Acquisition and Disposition**

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 5 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 2025 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 2026 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.

HB893 would work in tandem with HB892: Business Regulation-Cemeteries- Actions for Sale, Transfer, or Alternate Use. HB893 would authorize state, county, or municipal governments to acquire abandoned cemeteries and transfer ownership to descendants, community organizations, or nonprofit organizations committed to cemetery care and preservation.

Why is this needed? Currently, there are hundreds if not thousands of Maryland cemeteries that have been abandoned due to unknown ownership or dissolved corporate ownership. The impact of this abandonment is easy to see – significant degradation due to neglect and vandalism, often seriously diminishing their historical and cultural value.

The bill provides detailed provisions to achieve its goals. Building upon the “abandoned cemetery” definition in existing law, the bill authorizes acquisition by various lawful actions (gifts, purchase, etc.), and requires outreach to members of descendant communities. New duties of organizations acquiring cemeteries are specified, including how cemeteries would be maintained, preserved, and protected. Court oversight is also specified, should a transfer fail.

By specifying how this transfer would function, the condition of abandoned cemeteries would improve, as damage from abandonment would be reduced or completely eliminated. For human remains that are reinterred, professional oversight would occur. Most importantly, this legislation represents direct action that will result in better protection of our treasured cemeteries, which are so important to maintaining and enhancing our state’s heritage.

**For these reasons, I request that you support HB893.** Thank you for your consideration of my request.

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