



House Economic Matters and Health Committees Hearing on HB 893 Date: February 25, 2026

CPMBS position: FAV

Cross-filed with SB 234

Business Regulation-- Abandoned Cemeteries-- Acquisition and Disposition

CPMBS is an all-volunteer nonprofit that since 1992 has advocated for improvement in distressful cemetery situations that occur across Maryland and for needed changes in state law. A 2022 report to the House and Senate Joint Chairmen proposed new strategies to improve dire situations of historic African American cemeteries, many of which meet the definition of Abandoned in current Maryland law.

HB893 will assist all Maryland cemeteries that have been abandoned over time. Most meet the definition due to unknown ownership. These sites -- found in every county and most towns -- have been left without attention and maintenance and usually without respect for the Marylanders buried there. Descendants cannot be found, and churches and institutions have long dissolved. Paper records are often non-existent or inadequate.

Intervention is required to provide willing local and state government entities the ability to step in when such Abandoned cemeteries are identified by willing citizens who want to protect them and to improve their futures. This bill provides a process for that intervention, should public entities wish to take advantage of it.

Enabling towns and counties to take advantage of this process will prove to be beneficial all around. Ownership by descendants and community groups would foster maintenance of abandoned cemeteries, thereby enhancing safety by correcting and removing environmental hazards such as collapsed vaults, sunken graves, dead trees, foliage overgrowth, and more. Developers would be discouraged from destroying and building over abandoned cemeteries without compunction. Abandoned and neglected cemeteries would be shepherded to ownership and consequently to legal accountability for maintenance. The preservation of abandoned cemeteries would serve to protect our history, heritage, and cultural beliefs regarding the sanctity of cemeteries and graves.

Without this legislation, Abandoned cemeteries will continue to be an unaddressed issue negatively impacting families, persons in interest, and communities. Unclear or disputed ownership and attendant lack of accountability will continue to result in cemeteries being unmanaged and unmaintained, leaving many in limbo and courts unable to decide. Without oversight these Abandoned cemeteries will remain public hazards and eyesores. Important lessons that could be learned from our history only found in cemeteries will be lost or remain unknown.

Our Coalition and many other advocates urge you to approve this bill and HB 892. They will be welcomed by willing Marylanders who envision a future for these needy sites matched with those who care about them.

Thank you for your consideration.

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