

HB0893 cross-filed with SB0234 -Abandoned Cemeteries-Acquisition and Disposition

**FAVORABLE**

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This bill creates a streamlined process allowing a cemetery with no known owner to be placed under the ownership of a jurisdiction, typically a county creating a clear title enabling it to then be transferred for the purpose of preservation.

Maryland has hundreds of cemeteries that have effectively become orphaned. They hold our history. When ownership is unknown, they fall into neglect, and families lose their connection to the past.

Most of these ownership problems aren't the result of purposeful disregard-they're the result of time. Families move away or die off. Caretakers can no longer maintain the grounds. Younger generations may not even know the cemetery exists. Legally, the paper trail often breaks down. Deeds may not mention a cemetery or a later deed may drop the cemetery's mention entirely. Developers sometimes left parcels unlabeled on plat maps. Assessment records may list long-deceased individuals as owners. In many cases, no one knows who is responsible or who has authority to maintain or protect these sites. Local government cannot intervene, even when a cemetery is visibly deteriorating. Those trying to visit or even care for the site do not know who to contact. These cemeteries, and their stories, slowly disappear.

I urge you to support legislation clearing a pathway to ownership and giving counties a way to identify responsible parties. Every cemetery has a story and Maryland has a rich history.

There are three generations of one African American family buried at Annapolis National Cemetery, a Korean midshipman buried at our Naval Academy, enslaved, lynched, & free Black residents, watermen, a Pan Am pilot and his wife killed on 9/11, astronauts, German and Italian POWs, and many who fled wars in other countries. Let's respect the people buried in these cemeteries and give families a way to reconnect with their past.

I urge your support for this bill bringing a clear path to a process for managing these cemeteries.