

HB 893_MD Labor_Letter of Support.docx (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Andrew Fulginiti

Position: FAV



DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LICENSING
Office of the Commissioner
1100 N. Eutaw Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Date: February 25, 2026
Committee: Senate Finance
Bill Title: HB893 – Business Regulation-Abandoned Cemeteries-
Acquisition and Disposition
Re: Letter of Support

HB 893, entitled – Business Regulation-Abandoned Cemeteries-Acquisition and Disposition, will provide authority to a governmental unit with the power to condemn properties to acquire property containing a cemetery. *For Clarity, OCO does not possess that authority or request that authority.*

Furthermore, with court approval this would allow the governmental unit to sell the property to a person or organization that would be willing to maintain and preserve the cemetery property.

HB 893 will provide a person or organization with a direct legal process to obtain abandoned property with a cemetery. Hopefully, this bill will allow abandoned cemeteries to obtain the preservation and maintenance needed to restore dignity to all that are buried on the property. However, if the sale of the cemetery property is not completed, the governmental unit will be responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the cemetery property. This will remain in effect until which time another buyer is found.

This bill could bring a positive remedy for abandoned cemeteries to gain ownership and hopefully over time help eliminate abandoned cemeteries in our State.

For questions, please contact Andrew Fulginiti, at **Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov**

RBS HB 893 Testimony February 23, 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: candy warden

Position: FAV

Candy Warden, President

Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc.

10240 Harvest Fields Drive

Woodstock, MD 22163

January 26, 2026

HB 893 Testimony: FAVORABLE

Sponsors: Delegates Hill, Boyce, Ebersole, Kaiser, Kaufman, J. Long, Ruth, Schindler, Simmons, Smith, and Stinnett ,

My name is Candy Warden, President of the Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc. (RBS). RBS is a volunteer, nonprofit group formed to protect the Rosa Bonheur Memorial Park (RBMP), which is a human and pet cemetery with thousands of burials. The people with loved ones resting at our cemetery span across all the counties of Maryland.

What is an Abandoned Cemetery?

An abandoned cemetery is a burial ground that is no longer being professionally operated or maintained. Abandoned cemeteries are not active in performing new burials and suffer from deteriorated conditions due to lack of upkeep.

Why is HB 893 Important?

Abandoned cemeteries typically have no designated ownership, which results in dangerous, unkempt areas that negatively impact families and communities. Abandoned cemeteries are also frequently targeted by developers who view them and the concerned families, organizations, and community groups without respect or consideration.

There is no legislation established for abandoned cemeteries to be acquired by the State, a county, or municipality thereby enabling transfer to families and descendants, descendant community organizations, non-profit organizations, and other community groups that will maintain them.

Legislation permitting the acquisition and disposition of abandoned cemeteries by governmental units must be enacted to avoid the desecration and destruction of Maryland cemeteries. It is imperative that legislation be established that would facilitate governmental acquisition of abandoned cemeteries and subsequent transfer to groups that would have vested interests.

Consequently, cemeteries could be protected for those concerned and that legal responsibility for care and maintenance could be assumed.

The Problem

Cemeteries require regular maintenance and repairs, such as, repairing and cleaning memorials, replacing and/or repairing broken fences, filling sunken and eroded areas, lawn mowing, and landscape care. There are also the effects of vandalism and other wanton destruction, which also need to be addressed. The following are several examples of abandoned cemeteries in various counties:

In Anne Arundel County there are over 40 cemeteries identified as abandoned with most being overgrown with vegetation and many being used as trash dumps and parking lots.

Harford County is home to Johnson-Hill Cemetery where the developer that owns the property denies ownership, so the cemetery has fallen into a state of thorough neglect and most of the headstones have been broken.

In Howard County in a Valley Mede neighborhood (formerly known as “Arcadia Estate”) there is nestled in a wooded area thick with thistle and high grass an abandoned cemetery that has been neglected for years. The stone wall has fallen in, there are smashed headstones, fallen monuments, and open sarcophagi. Ownership is unknown as the developer that built the surrounding homes has moved on.

Abandoned cemeteries may range from a single grave to thousands of graves as in the case of Baltimore County’s Zion Cemetery. When the owner Warren Harmis passed away it was discovered that he had represented the cemetery as belonging to the AME church possibly to avoid paying taxes. The AME church denies ownership. As the cemetery falls into ruin with broken headstones, collapsing burial locations, overgrown grass and weeds, etc. no one knows who owns it.

Benefits of HB 893

- Abandoned cemeteries could be acquired by the State, counties, or municipalities for transfer to families and descendants, descendant community organizations, non-profit organizations, and other community groups that would provide maintenance.
- Necessary legal protections would be provided, there would be a voice for families, concerned organizations and groups, and person(s) in interest, and support for their diverse social, cultural, ethical, and religious beliefs and how they choose to honor their dead.
- Abandoned cemeteries would no longer be dangerous, unkempt areas, but spaces of respect, serenity, and order that would benefit and beautify their communities.

Remains interred in a cemetery must at all times be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. These beliefs are normative and widely held by Constituents across Maryland. Cemetery legislation is critical to protect all Maryland gravesites.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this testimony, which is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Candy Warden

Rosa Bonheur Society, Inc. (founded May 2007)

2010 Periwinkle Award Winner, Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites

HB0893 written testimony new 2.pdf

Uploaded by: Christine Simmons

Position: FAV

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

FAVORABLE

Christine Simmons
521 West Drive
Severna Park, MD 21146

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.

MCLA support of HB893.pdf

Uploaded by: David Zinner

Position: FAV



February 23, 2026

Dear Chairs Kriselda Valderrama and Heather Bagnall:

The Maryland Cemetery Legislative Advocates (MCLA) ask for your support of HB893.

1. The role of the court for condemning a cemetery with no known owner is laid out in Court rule 12-204. This bill is not about neglected cemeteries, religious cemeteries, or any other cemetery that has no owner.
2. Our bill provides that governmental entities may initiate the condemnation process.
3. Governmental entity is clearly defined in existing law
4. The goal of this process is to maintain and preserve the cemetery, preferably by a descendant group or a non-profit.
5. We anticipate that organizations that want to care for an ownerless cemetery will approach a government entity to cooperatively work to transfer ownership.

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) misunderstands this bill when it states that the bill addresses “neglected burial sites.” To the contrary, HB893 only addresses cemeteries where there is no owner. The bill does not mention, nor does it impact, cemeteries that are neglected.

MCC lists three reasons the bill “raises serious religious liberty concerns”. Yet each of the three arguments they make are negated by the fact that this bill only addresses cemeteries with no known owner.

MCC goes on to discuss challenges to parish-owned cemeteries. Again, the bill only addresses cemeteries with no known owner.

MCC asserts that cemeteries that are “quiet or historic” are covered by this bill. They are not.

Descendant groups, scouts and others that want to help, need owner permission to go on the land. HB893 provides a way to establish ownership.

Please support HB893

David Zinner for the MCLA

CPMBS Testimony ECM&Health Cttes HB893 hearing F

Uploaded by: Eileen McGuckian

Position: FAV



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.

Hope Metzler, President
Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites, Inc.
president@cpmbs.org

Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites, Inc.

P.O. Box 1533 | Ellicott City, Maryland 21041 | www.cpmbs.org

MPI to Health +ECM HB893 2.25.26 .pdf

Uploaded by: Eileen McGuckian

Position: FAV

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.

Eileen McGuckian, President, Montgomery Preservation, Inc. 301-468-7331

Elinor Thompson HB0892 & 0893.pdf

Uploaded by: Elinor Thompson

Position: FAV

I am writing to express my strong support for HB0892 and HB0893, legislation concerning the protection of abandoned and neglected cemeteries and their transfer to descendant communities.

As the visionary founder of the Ancestral Remains Project and a former Maryland Commissioner on African American History and Culture for Anne Arundel County and the Maryland Historical Trust, I have seen firsthand the critical importance of preserving these sacred spaces. Since the age of six, I have been active in preserving and documenting cemeteries through my own genealogical methodology. My advocacy is deeply personal, rooted in the stories of my late mother, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, husband and my dear friend, Ms. Terri V. Sorrell.

Terri and I reconnected decades after our high school days on the Eastern Shore. While battling cancer, her greatest wish was to obtain and maintain the property in Queen Anne's County where her family is laid to rest, including her ancestor London Ghound, a conductor on the Underground Railroad. In a powerful twist of history, we discovered that London Ghound served over eight years in the Maryland Penitentiary for helping my own ancestors escape slavery.

Terri worked tirelessly to organize a non-profit to protect this cemetery, but she sadly passed away on January 3, 2026. The fate of her ancestral resting place now remains uncertain. If Terri were here today, she would undoubtedly be a vocal advocate for these bills.

I urge you to support HB0892 and HB0893 to ensure that descendant communities have the right to care for their ancestors and that history like that of Terri and London Ghound is never erased.

Sincerely,

Elinor Thompson

Support for HB0893 - SB0234.pdf

Uploaded by: Elizabeth Paul

Position: FAV

In Support of HB 0893/SB 0234 Abandoned Cemeteries - Acquisition and Disposition:

As President of the Friends of Halfway African American Cemetery, I am writing in support of HB 0893. Our nonprofit is solely dedicated to preserving and restoring a nearly-lost, historically significant Black cemetery just outside Hagerstown city limits. The legal owner of the remaining cemetery is the organization that originally founded the cemetery in 1897. But this organization became defunct sometime in the 1940s. We have worked with real estate lawyers as well as an attorney with expertise in Black cemetery ownership challenges to explore every possible legal avenue to ownership. We have tried to work with the Washington County Board of Commissioners. All to no avail after six years.

Not having ownership and having no real existing owner has prevented us from applying for numerous grants to further our preservation efforts, especially the repair of the many broken stones. It also prevents us from getting military stones for the 13 veterans from the Civil War who currently have no grave markers of any kind.

This cemetery has experienced degradation, destruction, and rampant racism over the decades. In the 1950s, a developer bought most of the six-acre cemetery, built homes on top of it - without moving any graves - and then put very restrictive "whites only" covenants in the deeds. In addition, these houses were built in such a way as to landlock the remaining 0.7 acre of cemetery so that no access was allowed to families from that time forward. I have donated a piece of my land to ensure a permanent public pathway which we solidify with a grant from the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority two years ago. But we are stymied in some of the other preservation and restoration work due to the ownership dilemma.

Our organization and its volunteers have worked hard to haul out trash, to cut back vegetation, to honor those buried there with research into their lives and regular events to acknowledge the veterans, and to find living descendants. But we continue to be stymied by our lack of ownership of the cemetery. Descendants support our nonprofit organization having ownerships, several descendants serve on the Board of Directors, and the neighbors have been grateful for the clean-up.

This legislation would provide a pathway to ownership that we currently do not have, even after six years of trying. It is nearly impossible to get ownership of an abandoned cemetery such as ours right now in Maryland, especially one that was never affiliated with any church or diocese.

I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information or in-person testimony if desired.

Our website is www.halfwayafricanamericancemetery.org for more information about the cemetery, its history, and the nearly 400 individuals buried in it.

Thank you for your time. Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Paul

Elizabeth A. Paul
President
Friends of Halfway African American Cemetery
C: 301-991-1309

Testimony in Support of HB0893 SB0234.pdf

Uploaded by: Katie Myers

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of HB0893 / SB0234

Business Regulation – Abandoned Cemeteries – Acquisition and Disposition

Delegate Hill

Good afternoon Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Myers, and I serve as Vice President of the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites. I am here in strong support of HB0893 and its cross-file, SB0234.

These bills would authorize a governmental unit to acquire property where an abandoned cemetery is located, require the governmental unit to make a good-faith effort to contact certain interested parties, and authorize a person or organization to petition a court to transfer such property when appropriate.

Across Maryland, abandoned cemeteries are often left in legal limbo due to dissolved corporations, unclear ownership, or the absence of responsible caretakers. Without a defined statutory process, these burial grounds fall into neglect and deterioration. This legislation creates a clear, responsible pathway to ensure these sacred spaces are preserved rather than forgotten.

As a native of Hoopers Island, I understand how deeply communities value historic cemeteries such as Anchor Hope Cemetery and Hoopers Island Graveyard. When ownership becomes unclear, families and local advocates are often left without legal options to protect the graves of their ancestors. These bills provide that pathway.

HB0893 and SB0234 bring clarity, accountability, and preservation to burial grounds that might otherwise be lost.

I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB893, letter to House Economic Matters Committee

Uploaded by: Mark Edwards

Position: FAV



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.

Mark Edwards
1204 Edgevale Road
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Mark_edwards1@verizon.net
(301) 758-8867

HB0893 PresMD FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Nicholas Redding

Position: FAV



PRESERVATION MARYLAND

February 25, 2026

Hon. Kriselda Valderrama
Economic Matters Committee
230 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: HB0893 FAVORABLE

Chairperson Valderrama,

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of Preservation Maryland and our thousands of statewide supporters, I thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of HB0893 - Business Regulation - Abandoned Cemeteries - Acquisition and Disposition.**

Preservation Maryland is the nonprofit, statewide voice for historic preservation that harnesses the power of historic places by revitalizing and reinvesting in communities, advocating, and building the historic trades workforce for the benefit of all Marylanders. (Learn more at: presmd.org)

This bill will authorize a governmental unit to acquire property on which an abandoned cemetery is located under certain circumstances and for a certain purpose. Which requires a governmental unit that acquires property under the Act to make a certain effort to contact certain persons for a certain purpose. And authorizes a person or organization to bring an action to request the court to transfer property acquired under the Act to the person or organization. We support this legislation as we believe its passage would support cemetery preservation.

HB0893 is an important piece of legislation, and we urge a favorable report.

Favorable

Sincerely,

Nicholas A. Redding, President & CEO

HB893 2026 Cemeteries -Abandoned _Sponsor Testimon

Uploaded by: Terri Hill

Position: FAV

TERRI L. HILL, M.D.

*Legislative District 12A
Howard County*

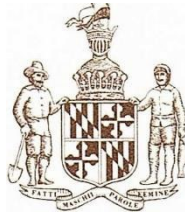
Health and Government Operations Committee

Subcommittees

Public Health and Minority Health Disparities, Chair

Elder and Long-Term Care

Maternal, Infant, and Child Health



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THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB893 Business Regulation - Cemeteries - Abandoned Cemeteries - Acquisition and Disposition

February 25, 2026

Chair and Members of the Committee,

House Bill 893 authorizes a governmental unit to acquire, by condemnation, property on which an abandoned cemetery is located with the intent to transfer that property to descendants of those interred, a descendant community organization, or a nonprofit organization.

The bill defines “abandoned cemetery” to include circumstances where the cemetery’s operating organization has ceased to exist without conveying title, where no property owner is listed in State records, where the property has been condemned, or where legal ownership cannot be determined.

If a governmental unit proceeds by condemnation, it must do so in accordance with Maryland Rule 12–204. After acquiring the property, the governmental unit is required to make timely and reasonable efforts to contact descendants of the deceased people interred in the cemetery to identify appropriate parties for transfer. A descendant, descendant community organization, or nonprofit organization may also bring an action requesting the court to transfer the property.

The bill further requires that any descendant, descendant community organization, or nonprofit organization that acquires the property must maintain and preserve the abandoned cemetery.

If the governmental unit retains the property, it must maintain and preserve the cemetery until transfer occurs, and if transfer cannot be accomplished within a reasonable period, the governmental unit may facilitate the reinterment of any human remains or pet remains to an appropriate operational cemetery.

The fiscal and policy note authorizes condemnation proceedings for abandoned cemeteries with the intent to transfer them to descendants, descendant community organizations, or nonprofit organizations, and requires maintenance and preservation following acquisition.

HB893 establishes a statutory process for the acquisition, transfer, maintenance, and, when necessary, reinterment associated with abandoned cemeteries.

I urge a favorable report.

Terri L. Hill, M.D.

HB 893_Silver_FAV with amendment.pdf

Uploaded by: Josh Silver

Position: FWA



Testimony of Josh Silver
Member of Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition
Before the Economic Matters Committee of the House of Delegates
Maryland General Assembly
Regarding HB 892 and HB 893
February 25, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Josh Silver and I am a lifelong resident of Bethesda MD. I am a member of the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC).

In my community, a parking lot was paved over a historic African American Cemetery. At least 200 bodies are beneath that parking lot. This must never ever happen again in the State of Maryland.

HB 892 and HB 893 would be essential laws in the struggle against desecration of cemeteries. They would empower descendant communities to protect their ancestors, resting in peace. Unfortunately, the Senate Finance Committee recently amended its version of these bills to make them ineffective. In fact, the new version of SB 233 could facilitate desecration.

Let me be very clear. BACC strongly supports HB 892 and supports HB 893 with an amendment. The Senate must agree to the House versions of these bills. If the Senate does not, we ask that these bills be withdrawn as they could inflict harm on our deceased ancestors.

Hubert Humphery, former Senator and Vice President, [stated](#), “The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.” This year, Maryland elected officials should consider that humane treatment of the elderly includes the treatment of ancestors buried in cemeteries. This population is disenfranchised because they cannot defend themselves. Maryland government should provide their descendants with the means to defend them.

BACC is a coalition of concerned citizens opposed to the desecration of [Moses African Cemetery](#) on River Road in Bethesda, MD. An African American community during slavery and after the Civil War buried their loved ones in the Moses Cemetery. After the Civil War, a resilient and remarkable African American community resided on River Road. They were stone masons and farmers. They formed the Macedonia Baptist Church which remains in operation today.

Spanning several years from World War II through the 1960s, KKK violence and public sector discrimination displaced the African American community. Many of them had to surrender ownership of their homes and land and fled the River Road area. The cemetery passed into the hands of developers who built apartment buildings and commercial enterprises on top of Moses African Cemetery.

Currently, BACC is involved in litigation against Montgomery County's Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC). HOC seeks to sell the Westwood Towers apartments to a developer. The



Maryland State Supreme Court affirmed that hundreds of bodies are beneath the apartment complex and its parking lot. The Supreme Court remanded the case to the Circuit Court which is expected to render a decision soon. Meanwhile, BACC has sued 1784 Holdings over its construction of a light storage facility on another part of Moses. The developer illegally removed burial remains to a warehouse in Virginia.

In this context, BACC believes that the protections in HB 892 as introduced this session regarding the sale and transfer of cemeteries are vital for the fight against cemetery desecration. BACC has had to struggle in the court system for years to [convince the courts to hear the case](#). In contrast, HB 892 would create an expeditious process. It would provide a right of private action for a descendant community and persons of interest to bring a case before the courts. Under HB 892, a court of equity would be required to hear the case and render a decision. The court could allow the sale and transfer or prohibit it. It could require a transfer of a cemetery to a descendant community or require negotiation between the parties in the litigation.

HB 892 does not guarantee any outcome, but it provides a fair opportunity for all parties to have their day in court. It increases the chances for equitable solutions and the cessation of desecration. It is modeled on the federal [Fair Housing Act](#) and other [civil rights laws](#) empowering historically disenfranchised communities to go to court.

On February 12, the Senate Finance Committee amended its version of HB 892 (SB 233) to require that cemetery owners seek the approval of the Director of the Office of Cemetery Oversight for their proposed sales or transfers of cemeteries. If a descendant community does not agree with the Director's opinion, it can bring a case to court but the court is not required to render a decision. In BACC's experience, state and local agencies have taken no action to protect the Moses African Cemetery. BACC is leery in placing this solemn decision-making power in any state agency without guaranteed recourse to the courts.

Under the amended version of SB 233, religious cemeteries would be exempt from the approval process of the Office of Cemetery Oversight. Therefore, a descendant community could not go to court to appeal decisions of the Director of that office. There is no judicial back-up protection at all in the case of religious cemeteries. Meanwhile, owners of non-religious cemeteries would be tempted to employ clever lawyers who would claim that their cemeteries are religious and thus escape accountability.

As introduced this session, HB 893 applies in the case of abandoned cemeteries. The owners of these cemeteries have ceased operations for a variety of reasons including bankruptcy. In the case of abandoned cemeteries, a local government can acquire the cemetery for the purpose of transferring it to a descendant community or other persons of interest. If a person of interest believes the local government is not acting in good faith, the bill would allow the person of interest to file a lawsuit. However, the bill in its current form needs to be amended to require a court to render a decision.

The Senate Finance Committee [amended SB 233](#) to remove judicial protections in the cases of abandoned cemeteries. Under the new version of SB 233, vulnerable and abandoned cemeteries



would be at the mercy of local governments and the Director of the Office of Cemetery Oversight. The history of neglect and desecration of cemeteries in Maryland indicates that this oversight is insufficient. In recent months, newspaper reports have described the century-long neglect of a burial site of African American boys mistreated at a reform school in [Prince Georges County](#). Elected officials recently expressed concern and are [considering grants](#) to preserve the burial site. Likewise, the [St. Vincent Cemetery in Baltimore](#) has experienced neglect and a nonprofit organization that includes descendants has recently been refurbishing the cemetery.

BACC wants to maintain the Moses African Cemetery as a cemetery and to build a museum and memorial. This would not only benefit the descendant community but would be of immense educational benefit to the wider community. It would teach them the history of a resilient community that suffered violent discrimination but has persevered and wants to share its story of the indomitable human spirit. In their current form, HB 892 and HB 893 would provide BACC and similar communities with better opportunities to pursue these sacred missions.

As a Jew, I can attest to the history of desecration and erasure. Let us take steps to preserve and teach history, not erase it. Future atrocities are less likely to occur if we remember. HB 893 and 893 provide an opportunity for restoration and remembrance. SB 233 threatens to remove that opportunity.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify on this sacred matter.

Testimony for Cemetary Bills.pdf

Uploaded by: Molly Carr

Position: FWA

Testimony for Cemetary Bills.

Protecting Cemeteries from Desecration

I am Molly Carr, of Cabin John, MD, a lifelong resident of Montgomery County Maryland.

I am a member of the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition (BACC) and I support HB 892 because this bill, if it were to become law, would help protect historic African American cemeteries by establishing the right of descendant communities to go to court in Maryland if they believe their cemeteries are being desecrated. I also support HB 893 because this bill, future law, would help protect abandoned cemeteries from being desecrated as well. For this bill, HB 893, I am requesting an amendment requiring a Maryland judge to make a decision regarding any case brought before the Maryland courts by a descendant community.

The reason I am testifying in support of Cemetery protection from desecration in Maryland is as follows. I am in my 60's now and have lived here more than ½ a century, born during the Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther King was alive and at his prime, working for racial justice, when I was born. Desegregation was in process then and was occurring in my neighborhood schools. I grew up right off of Wisconsin Ave, the road taken by President Lincoln in and out of Washington DC. This road was taken by Union Solidiers black and white to sacrifice their lives for a more just society, one that was to attempting to live up to the Ideals and Values articulated in the U.S. Constitution. I now live right off of River Road, where I recently found out about two very different historical realities in the 1800's. Maryland was a slave state until the end of the Civil War but Washington, DC was a place of sanctuary and safety for people of African descent to flee the brutality of slavery pre-civil war and during and after. Tenleytown in DC due to its U.S. military fort was a place where they could live in safety. However, River Road which "dead ends" into Wisconsin Ave, just down the hill from Tenleytown, just beyond the DC border was a community of African descent that was mostly enslaved, and there were 4 large plantations. There was a "bottom lands area" where the people of African descent were buried for at least 150 years. The people of European descent were buried up on higher ground. This "bottom lands area" was divided up into 5 parcels and sold without protection of the law to monied interests who industrialized these parcels and in the process paved it over in the 1960's despite there being very clear evidence and presence of a African Cemetary called Moses. Do I need to say that this desecration violates the Ideals and Values of the United States Constitution and our common humanitarian values of loving and honoring all people during their lives and deaths? Many of the people buried in Moses African Cemetery suffered

profoundly in life, the least we can do now is honor their humanity and return to our humanitarian values now in 2026 by restoring this sacred cemetery and create laws that prevent this from ever happening again. How many industrialized zones in Maryland were created to cover up a dark past to bring profit to those who are of the 'monied class'? Is this how we want to proceed forward into the future? Putting money and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of humanitarian values? With climate change looming, if we care about the long view of self-preservation and the preservation of humanity, we can't afford to do this any longer.

Now I mentioned two different historical realities off River Road. The other is of the Community of Gibson Grove, in Cabin John, MD where there is another cemetery associated with Moses Tabernacle off of Seven Locks Road. This community was founded after the Civil War and was able to own land and establish a church and a graveyard that was maintained and not wrongfully sold and industrialized. It was partially desecrated and paved over by the Washington beltway in the 1960's, however. Because this cemetery land was never sold and never abandoned, it had a very different fate than the fate of Moses African Cemetery on River Road. It is being restored, and the Gibson Grove Community and its descendants are being honored. This is a story of repair and possibility for recognizing wrongs of the past, but also remembering that this is our shared story, whether we come from European Colonial privilege or African Colonial enslavement. Going forward we need to recognize our common humanity; and uphold the Ideals and Values of United States Constitution of Liberty, and Justice for all. Please support the Cemetery Bills with the language that protects the sacred, burial grounds of ALL people including but not limited to European, African, Asian, Arab, Hispanic and Native American.

Thank you again for considering my testimony on this very important matter to All Marylanders here now, here in the past and for those Marylanders of the future.

Testimony In Support With Amendment of HB0893.pdf

Uploaded by: Robert Stubblefield

Position: FWA

Testimony In Support With Amendment of HB0893-Acquisition and Deposition of Abandoned(Unowned, Not neglected) Cemeteries

To the House Economic Matters Committee

Greetings

My name is Robert Alex Stubblefield and I am a poet, lay minister, and activist-organizer with groups such as the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition and I am writing in full support of House Bill 893-Acquisition and Deposition of Abandoned(Unowned, Not Neglected). My reasons are explained below.

I support this bill because it is inspired by the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition's victory at the Maryland Supreme Court which gave descendant communities in Maryland not only the right to bring suit against developers and/or government agencies but also that descendant communities have the right to seek equitable relief. A claim that we have often heard in our struggle is that local and state government can't do anything even with some statute on the books. What this bill does is that it takes away that excuse. Now it can actually pinpoint local agencies in any county to actually acquire and work with descendant communities to regain their cemeteries/burial grounds.

That being said, I do have a concern. The concern is that it makes acquiring a cemetery optional. This is a huge concern for several reasons. One reason is that many counties and municipalities have not worked with descendant communities in good faith. In fact, in many cases they have actually been hostile in the return of cemeteries to descendant groups and working hand in hand with private developers. This has been done despite the fact that descendant groups have come forward, shown both historical, genealogical, and archaeological records of their cemetery or cemeteries being in that area, counties and municipalities have not done anything to facilitate the return. Oftentimes, they have only issued a proclamation, a plaque or a weak apology and that's it. This bill cannot be only optional, it must be mandatory. It must compel local government to not only make a good faith effort to work with descendant communities but to actually acquire and transfer to descendant communities for them to do and properly take care of the cemetery and memorialize.

In closing, this bill is necessary but must be made stronger by an amendment to make mandatory to acquire an abandoned cemetery, not as an option.

Thank you

New 2026 HB0893 Abandoned Aquisition and Dispositi

Uploaded by: Yvonne Fisher

Position: FWA

Abandoned Cemeteries- Acquisition

HB0893 – Testimony of Yvonne Fisher for Judicial Proceedings- Economic Matters

I am a member of the Maryland Cemetery Legislative Advocates (MCLA). Our group has extensive experience with cemetery issues.

I have also been a member of the Advisory Council for the Office of Cemetery Oversight (ACCO) for 9 years. My testimony today is not as a representative of the council.

Sales and transfers of Cemeteries should have a more strict and procedural process that must be documented and approved by the department of Cemetery Oversight. There are no regulations of legal requirements to assure that this process does not leave room for abuses and illegal use of a cemetery.

There should be a **requirement** that research has been done to assure that there is no **viable** owner/s of a cemetery and inform every family whose loved one is **interred** in **that cemetery** of **all** proposed **new ownership and possible new use**. This will give the families time to make inquiries and obtain information about the new proprietors.

It is to the benefit of everyone in the State of Maryland to be assured that their loved ones are protected from any form of abuse and neglect that may be a result of a **sale** or **transfer** that has not been communicated to them. If there is no legal procedure this could possibly result in situations that would negatively affect the families of those individuals that are interred.

There must be notification to all the families of those **interred** in the cemetery of the proposed sale within **a period of time** that will allow them to **investigate** disinterment to another cemetery or other wishes that the

families may have. We must always remember that in **life** or in **death** we should be mindful of the respect that we give particularly to those who are unable to protect themselves.

No one thinks about their last resting place daily, but we do think about our loved ones and their last resting place. Those individuals are not here to protect themselves, so it is imperative that we protect their last resting place by assuring that there are legal requirements and procedures that will protect them.

We must assure that there are procedures and processes in place for not only those who have passed away and are now interred in a cemetery but for all of us who someday will be in that position.

We must be the protectors for those who are not able to protect themselves.

Maryland Catholic Conference_HB893_UNFAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Jenny Kraska

Position: UNF



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 25, 2026

**HB 893 Business Regulation –Abandoned Cemeteries – Acquisition and Disposition
House Economics Matters Committee
Position: Unfavorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) offers testimony in opposition to House Bill 893. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state’s second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

While we appreciate HB 893’s intention to address neglected burial sites, the legislation raises significant concerns for religiously operated cemeteries. HB 893 allows third parties to initiate legal processes regarding cemeteries deemed “abandoned.” For religious cemeteries, this raises serious religious liberty concerns:

- Interference with internal religious governance: Decisions about the care, maintenance, and long-term stewardship of a Catholic cemetery are guided by canon law and pastoral judgment.
- Risk of state-supervised alteration or transfer: A court could be placed in the position of evaluating or overriding decisions rooted in religious doctrine.
- Potential for disputes initiated by individuals with no connection to the faith community: This undermines the autonomy of religious institutions to care for their sacred spaces.

The First Amendment protects the right of religious communities to manage their own burial grounds without undue state intrusion. HB 893 threatens that autonomy.

Many parishes maintain historic cemeteries with limited financial resources. These cemeteries are not abandoned, they are lovingly preserved within the means available. HB 893 could unintentionally:

- Create new legal vulnerabilities for parishes
- Force religious institutions into costly legal processes
- Pressure dioceses to consolidate or transfer cemeteries to avoid misclassification This is an unnecessary burden on faith communities that already take their responsibilities seriously.

HB 893’s treatment of “abandoned cemeteries” risks sweeping in religious cemeteries that are active in a spiritual and pastoral sense, even if they are quiet or historic. It threatens the sacred character of burial grounds, introduces avoidable religious liberty concerns, and risks state

intrusion into the internal governance of faith communities. For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on HB 893.

HB 893 - ECM 02-25-2026 - MDCCA OPP.pdf

Uploaded by: John Stierhoff

Position: UNF



February 25, 2026

The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, House Economic Matters Committee
231 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: HB 893 – Business Regulation – Abandoned Cemeteries – Acquisition and Disposition

Dear Chair Valderrama:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Cemetery and Cremation Association (“MDCCA”) in opposition to House Bill 893.

Founded in 1916, the Maryland Cemetery and Cremation Association represents the shared interests and concerns of professionals across the spectrum of Maryland’s “deathcare” industries.

House Bill 893 authorizes a governmental unit to acquire property on which an abandoned cemetery is located; requires a governmental unit that acquires property under the Act to make a timely and reasonable effort to contact descendants of the persons interred in the abandoned cemetery; and authorizes a person or organization to bring an action to request the court to transfer property acquired under the Act to that person or organization.

MDCCA recognizes and supports the issues raised by the proponents of House Bill 893. However, the proposal includes vague and potentially overly broad categories of organizations and individuals to whom a governmental unit may transfer property. Additionally, the governmental unit allowed to use condemnation proceedings is also undefined, raising serious concerns that the proposal could face constitutional scrutiny.

The process for maintaining and preserving abandoned cemeteries, and the facilitation of the reinterment of any human or pet remains on the property, requires strict regulation and oversight. The Office of Cemetery Oversight, established under the regulatory authority of the State Department of Labor, would be the logical entity to monitor and ensure the appropriate processes are in place. However, the Office is not contemplated to be involved in the statutory scheme proposed in House Bill 893.

MDCCA believes that the worthy goals of House Bill 893 would be more fully achieved if all interested parties convened during the legislative interim to study the impact and implementation of this proposal.

The Maryland Cemetery and Cremation Association respectfully requests the House Economic Matters Committee to study the impact of House Bill 893 and we offer our association and lay leaders representing nearly fifty Maryland cemeteries to assist and participate in that study.

Sincerely,

Glenn S. Easton
President

cc: Members, House Economic Matters Committee

SB234_ HB 893-Business Regulation-Abandoned Cemete

Uploaded by: Deborah Rappazzo

Position: INFO



DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LICENSING
Office of the Commissioner
1100 N. Eutaw Street
Baltimore, MD 21201

Date: February 25, 2026

Committee: Senate Finance

Bill Title: HB893 – Business Regulation-Abandoned Cemeteries- Acquisition and Disposition

Re: Letter of Support

HB 893, entitled – Business Regulation-Abandoned Cemeteries-Acquisition and Disposition, will provide authority to a governmental unit with the power to condemn properties to acquire property containing a cemetery. *For Clarity, OCO does not possess that authority or request that authority.*

Furthermore, with court approval this would allow the governmental unit to sell the property to a person or organization that would be willing to maintain and preserve the cemetery property.

HB 893 will provide a person or organization with a direct legal process to obtain abandoned property with a cemetery. Hopefully, this bill will allow abandoned cemeteries to obtain the preservation and maintenance needed to restore dignity to all that are buried on the property. However, if the sale of the cemetery property is not completed, the governmental unit will be responsible for the maintenance and preservation of the cemetery property. This will remain in effect until which time another buyer is found.

This bill could bring a positive remedy for abandoned cemeteries to gain ownership and hopefully over time help eliminate abandoned cemeteries in our State.

For questions, please contact Andrew Fulginiti, at [**Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov**](mailto:Andrew.Fulginiti@maryland.gov)