



February 17, 2026

The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair Senate Finance Committee  
The Honorable Antonio Hayes, Vice Chair Senate Finance Committee  
The Maryland State Senate Finance Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**SB 510 - State Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors – Funeral Direction Licensure and Apprentices – Requirements**

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I represent Dignity Memorial, which owns 18 funeral homes and 14 cemeteries in Maryland, serving over 5000 families annually. I write in support of **SB 510 - State Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors – Funeral Direction Licensure and Apprentices – Requirements**.

SB 510 addresses the educational requirements to become a funeral director in the State of Maryland. In 2007, the General Assembly passed HB 457, directing the Board of Morticians to enact regulations to create a funeral director license separate from the existing mortician license. This bill was introduced by the Honorable Saqib Ali and the Honorable Samuel Rosenberg, members of the House of Delegates. Their purpose was to address what were believed to be licensing practices prejudicial to the Muslim and Jewish faiths, which prohibit embalming as a desecration of human remains.

The requirements to be licensed as a mortician requires extensive education, both academic and practical, in the science of embalming. Maryland's funeral director license was created to allow for licensure, which did not require competency in the practice of embalming. Yet, today, Board of Morticians regulations require funeral director candidates to complete the same sciences curriculum as morticians, with the exception of being

exempt from the embalming practicum. The typical mortuary science curriculum includes courses in anatomy, biology, microbiology, embalming and restorative arts. Therefore, despite the prohibition of embalming, funeral director candidates of the Muslim and Jewish faiths are required to study these subjects. This bill will eliminate those aspects of the curriculum for licensure as a funeral director.

Beyond the religious implications of the existing curriculum, the duties and responsibilities of someone practicing only funeral directing are distinctly different from those of an embalmer. For this reason, mortuary schools which offer a separate funeral director curriculum replace most of the sciences with courses which are more relevant to the responsibilities and practice of funeral directing. These include classes in management, public speaking, accounting, sociology, psychology, and ethics. Most programs, however, also require coursework in pathology, with an emphasis on the protection of personal and public health.

As with most professions today, funeral service has evolved to allow its practitioners to concentrate in their specialized field, whether funeral directing and embalming. Today, cremation is the most selected method of disposition, with embalming decreasingly selected. According to the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), today nearly two thirds of all deaths result in cremation. By 2045, it is expected that fewer than 20% of all deaths will result in burial. Therefore, the future need for funeral directors far outstrips the need for embalmers. Complicating this forecast is, again, according to a survey conducted by the NFDA, 60% of all funeral directors currently practicing plan to retire within the next five years. Retirements, not growth, will account for 80% of all job openings.

The death rate in the United States is projected to rise exponentially in the next 25 years. The US Census Bureau estimates the death rate will reach 3.6 million deaths annually by 2037, an increase from 2.5 million in 2015. By 2055, the rate will peak at about 4 million deaths per year. This growth will place increasing demands on funeral service and the need for funeral directors to meet with families. However, new entrants into the field are not keeping up with the significant demand for licensees due to retirement. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts an annual need of 5,800 funeral directors to compensate for retirements, yet mortuary schools graduate only about 1,600 students annually. To meet the rising demand, licensing laws must fit the demand. With the increasing death rate, it is imperative that we address what is already a shortage of funeral directors by eliminating barriers to entry such as requiring embalming of all licensees. As with any other profession, it is necessary to allow for specialization and create a path for licensing more funeral directors.

Despite the creation of a funeral director license in 2007, today Maryland has only 8 licensed funeral directors and only one of those is actively practicing in Maryland. Compare this to Virginia, which enacted similar legislation in 2020. Virginia does not require the same science curriculum for funeral directors as it does a funeral service licensee, which is the combined funeral director and embalmer license. Since 2021, Virginia has licensed 68 funeral directors and currently has 40 funeral director interns (apprentices). Eliminating the sciences curriculum has created a new path for individuals to enter funeral service. However, recognizing the need to be knowledgeable of public health matters, funeral directors are required to complete coursework in pathology.

The current and impending shortage of funeral directors has been recognized across the United States. Today, 28 states have separate funeral director licenses. With few exceptions, these states have eliminated the embalming curriculum from the funeral director academic requirements. In recognition of this, the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards has split the National Board Exam into two parts, Arts and Sciences, and administers each part separately for candidates, based upon their state's licensing requirements.

It is my desire that Maryland will follow suit and address the academic requirements of the funeral director license to focus upon the course work most relevant to the practice of funeral directing and allow us to recruit new entrants to our profession.

I ask for you to act favorably upon SB 510.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blair H. Nelsen".

Blair H. Nelsen, Director, Governmental Affairs  
Dignity Memorial of Maryland