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MAYOR

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HB0564

March 24, 2026

TO: Members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 564 – Pet Cremation and Burial Services - Requirements (Pet Cremation and Burial Services Consumer Protection Act)

POSITION: Favorable

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 564.

HB 564 establishes consumer protections requirements for registered cemeterians, registered cemetery operators, and permit holders that sell cremation services for pet remains. For example, the bill will require registrants and permit holders that provide pet cremation services to retain records for each cremation performed. The bill also establishes duties of those who are responsible for returning pet cremains to the pet's owners after cremation, including, among other things, providing the owner with a certificate that states, to the best of the person's knowledge, the cremains are those of the owner's deceased pet.

Every day, Animal Enforcement Officers witness the strong bond between people and their pets. They see families who treat their animals as companions, protectors, and sources of comfort. When a pet dies, that loss is deeply felt and families place enormous trust in the professionals who handle their animal's remains, believing they will be treated with dignity and respect. Recently, the Baltimore City Office of Animal Control learned of an individual who systematically defrauded more than 100 grieving families by returning fake ashes in the form of sand or concrete. These pets were not cremated, but instead were either dumped on the side of the road or left rotting in a vehicle piled on top of each other. When the bodies were discovered, most were unidentifiable and only bones and fur remained. These families were not just financially exploited; they were emotionally devastated. They believed they were receiving closure for the loss of their companion, but instead they were deceived at their most vulnerable moment. The emotional damage was immeasurable and the families were retraumatized.

This incident exposed a critical gap in our system. Businesses such as veterinary offices, boarding kennels, breeders, shelters, and groomers are regulated, but the pet aftercare industry operates with no oversight or uniform standards. Without these safeguards, bad actors erode society's trust. This incident left the public asking how something like this could happen. The answer is simple: it is because we have no laws or regulations to prevent it.

This bill does not impose unreasonable burdens; rather, it establishes clear and basic expectations. These are the same protections already required in other industries that handle sensitive, high-trust services. Maryland regulates funeral homes for humans, and it is time that we ensure similar integrity for the aftercare of animals who hold deep emotional significance for their families.

This bill will ensure that no family in our state ever again experiences the betrayal that more than 100 victims endured in the Baltimore City community. On behalf of the BCA, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB 564.