



SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

JANUARY 29, 2026

SENATE BILL 234

BUSINESS REGULATION - CEMETERIES - ACTIONS FOR SALE, TRANSFER, OR ALTERNATE USE

OPPOSE

Agudath Israel of Maryland, the Mid-Atlantic regional office for Agudath Israel of America, a renowned national Jewish advocacy organization with chapters across the country, speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish communities and religious institutions across Maryland. We write today in opposition to Senate Bill 234.

Senate Bill 234 would authorize certain governmental units to acquire and maintain an abandoned cemetery, and manage the property in a certain manner while requiring them to attempt to contact the descendants of the interred, descendant community organizations of the cemetery, or eligible nonprofits, in order to potentially transfer the property. If such transfer does not occur within a reasonable period, the governmental unit would maintain and preserve the abandoned cemetery but may facilitate reinterment of remains to an active cemetery.

In the Jewish faith, the cemetery is not merely a place in which to store bodies, but a place of deep religious significance. Rather than mere custom, Jewish ritual law governs a myriad of details of burial and cemetery upkeep and includes strong prohibitions on the disturbance of graves or exhumation. The obligations involved in maintaining cemeteries in accordance with every detail of Jewish law is viewed as both a deep religious responsibility and an important responsibility to the dead, who chose to be buried in accordance with Jewish law as well as Jewish custom.

We are concerned that Senate Bill 234 would unintentionally result in violations of the sanctity of the grave, through changes in stewardship and maintenance, through misunderstanding of the requirements of Jewish law and custom, through decisions to transfer buried remains, etc. We therefore respectfully ask the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 234.