



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs

Protecting a consumer's right to a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral.

HB 1150 - Support

Testimony for the House Committee on Health and Government Operations of the Maryland General Assembly

March 7, 2012

Submitted by Brian E. Ditzler, Vice President,
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Chairman Hammen, Vice Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony from the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs (FCAME) in support of House Bill 1150 on the qualifications for licensure of morticians, funeral directors and apprentices.

FCAME is the volunteer-run, regional chapter of the national non-profit Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA). The 100 of so chapters across the country of the FCA are dedicated to helping consumers be more informed about after-death care options available to them, and protecting the public from fraud and abuse in cremation, funeral and burial transactions.

The fundamental issue raised by this legislation is whether the Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors is allowed to ensure that only fully qualified individuals are allowed to practice mortuary science in funeral homes in this state.

To its credit, the Board of Morticians recognizes the general public, as well as the reputation of their profession, would benefit from allowing the Board to exercise its judgment in deciding whether basic educational requirements are adequately met before licensure is granted.

HB 1150 in reality would not be giving the Board new authority but rather just enabling it to carry out one of its current responsibilities. Section 7-303 (a)(1) of the Annotated Code of Maryland reads, "The Board shall determine the qualifications necessary for an individual to lawfully engage in the practice of mortuary science or funeral direction and to operate a funeral establishment within this State."

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As presently written, Maryland law allows students to work in funeral homes if they meet their coursework and practical experience requirements in a school that is accredited by the American Board of Funeral Service Education. What has changed is that the school accreditation group now is permitting practical experience to be gained in an actual work setting -- in a funeral home -- versus requiring practical experience to be obtained in a school laboratory setting.

This means, in effect, that mortuary science students are embalming the bodies of deceased individuals whose unsuspecting family members think they are paying for the work of experienced professionals.

It is understandable why some funeral homes may prefer the present law, as it allows them to use cheaper labor from students gaining needed practical experience before or at the same time they are performing their apprenticeship, while getting full price from the consumer for services performed. This approach may be financially advantageous for funeral directors, but it clearly doesn't make sense for consumers or the public welfare.

The Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors is to be commended for determining that the requirements to work in a funeral home in our state need to be strengthened now that the American Board of Funeral Service Education has changed its requirements for accrediting schools.

The changes proposed in HB 1150 would greatly benefit the consumer and protect the public welfare. My consumer group strongly encourages the committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.