

Senate Bill 2139

Chair Lee and members of Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Nic Stevenson. I have had the privilege of serving as a Funeral Director in the state of North Dakota for nearly 20 years and am currently serving on the North Dakota Funeral Directors Association board. Please consider my testimony in support of Senate Bill 2139.

As a funeral director we are committed, some would say dedicated, to serve our community. We are there to serve whenever a death occurs, weather anticipated or unexpected, young or old, we are there to serve the families of our community in some of their greatest times of need. Part of this commitment is serving all families, even if they do not have the means of paying for their loved one's services. When this occurs, we have worked with our counties under the indigent burial policies to seek financial assistance. This assistance is very limited and sometime nominal compared to the services that we can be asked to render to these families and yet we understand that and know that it is our duty to care for all members of our communities.

With the Department of Health & Human Services restructuring into human service zones it has removed the obligation from the counties to take care of these indigent burials and in turn placed it on each zone. The North Dakota Funeral Directors along with the Department of Health & Human Services has worked to update the process of indigent burials so that it can be standardized throughout the state. We support Senate bill 2139 and recommend the committee's approval.

This bill simplifies the wording taking care of the state required means of disposition, rather than burial. It also requires that all eligible families, must choose cremation. Cremation is the most popular means of disposition in our state at 59% and this rate is projected to grow each year. Cremation is approved by over 95 percent of the religions in North Dakota and would not create a hardship to the majority of our residence.

Several years ago, legislation was passed to allow funeral homes to move forward with the means of disposition when no next of kin could be contacted within 7 days. This bill will allow Funeral homes along with the county coroner and Human Service Zone director to be legally authorized to fulfill the intent of that law and take care of final disposition for individuals that do not have any next of kin. This also removes the potential liability from the funeral home, county coroner and Human service Zone director for fulfilling the requirement of this bill.

To update the reimbursement amount for indigent services we surveyed the current reimbursements agreed upon from the counties across the state. The recommended \$3,500.00 falls in the middle of what those counties provided. We also surveyed 34 funeral homes across the state and found that the average cost of direct cremation with no service is \$3868.00. Because of these two factors we support the recommended \$3,500.00 listed in this bill.

Because of these reasons the North Dakota Funeral Directors Association recommends that the committee approve Senate Bill 2139.

Respectfully,

Nic Stevenson

North Dakota Funeral Directors Association