

Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Brennan and members of the Committee.

Good afternoon . My name is Tracy Lentz and I am the President of the National Institute of Funeral Service (NIFS). I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you briefly and to answer any questions that you might have about this proposed new school in Maine

As representative Doudera said, I planned NIFS for over two years. I am asking to receive degree granting authority as a post-secondary institution offering a 64 credit Associate Degree in Applied Science.

One might ask, whether I am qualified to plan and implement a funeral school. I did not do it alone. I selected the board and consultants who had the experience to make it happen. My consultant, Dr. George Connick, and I both ran the largest mortuary service program in the United States. Dr. Connick was the Executive Vice President of the school for 15 years and then President for 2+ years until he retired in March 2021. I was the Dean of the school in charge of all academic, student and administrative services. I have a Masters Degree in Higher Education and I have been a funeral director 27 years and an online and campus funeral service professor for the last 15 years.

Board member Dr. Jason Altieri was the president of the second largest funeral school in the US (which is in Texas). The board also includes two Maine funeral directors that will ensure that I understood Maine's uniqueness and that we serve its needs as funeral service continues to change. Everyone on the board is a licensed funeral director except the finance person. The two consultants and the registrar are long-time residents of Maine.

My original application was 66 pages with 176 pages of follow up material (handbooks, policies, resumes, etc). After my initial meeting with the Self-Study Committee appointed by the DOE, I wrote a new document of 109 pages with more in-depth handbooks, etc. to address the DOE's concerns of quality, presence, and library/computer resources. The DOE Committee has postponed the review of these documents and has not rescheduled with me yet. But again, all concerns were addressed.

The Self-Study Committee wanted a longer lease and so I renewed my lease for five years to show my commitment to Maine. Though I had a digital library in my first DOE document , the DOE wanted a physical location. I agreed with the DOE and in my second document I explained in great detail that I have spoken to Bowdoin College, and they are willing to let NIFS students use their library and computers under the extensive guest policy that I included in the document. I have also arranged to have 3 computers in my office and will have a person in the office who will provide student support and can also proctor finals if need be.

The last concern was financial backing. I have received a \$300,000 line of credit which is triple what I need, because the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) the national accrediting association for all 58 accredited funeral service programs and institutions requires that each program, school or college have enough financial resources to teach out any graduating class in case the school were to close. And lastly I wanted to add that by teaching remotely, I am able to keep the tuition low to help Maine students. American Academy (AAMI) in NYC is \$525 a credit, FINE Mortuary College (in Boston) is \$707.00 per credit, Goodwin University (in Connecticut) is \$760 a credit and Cape Cod Community College (Massachusetts) is \$429.00 for out-of-state students. NIFS has made the tuition competitive but not overpriced at \$350.00 a credit.

Finally, and most importantly to students, we will offer every class every semester, with 3 complete semesters a year, to ensure students can complete the program quickly if they so wish.

In conclusion, not only is the program sustainable, NIFS will help to address the funeral director shortage in the Northeastern states.

And now, Dr. Connick would like to briefly address the committee and then I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.

1/25/23 5:35 PM