

Written Testimony before the State of Maine Legislature
LD 505 – An Act to update the Reimbursement Rates for Transportation Of Deceased
Persons by Funeral Homes

Position: Support

Testimony By
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Co-Chairs, Senator Baldacci and Representative Meyer, members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Jim Fernald and am proud to say that I am a fifth generation funeral service practitioner in this great State of Maine. I am a member of the Maine Funeral Directors Association Legislative Committee. MFDA is comprised of funeral practitioners throughout the state. As a Representative of MFDA, as well as an owner of Brookings-Smith Funeral Homes with three chapels in the Bangor Region, I wish to go on record as supporting LD 505 as currently written.

I first would like to state that for the most part, Maine's funeral service practitioners and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) have a very good professional relationship. Over the years funeral service practitioners have transported human remains to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner which is housed in Augusta, Maine. Practitioners have done this since the inception of the OCME. Basically, the system works relatively well wherein practitioners are contacted by the OCME to transport (remove) human remains from the place of death and assist law enforcement officers at the scene when requested and as appropriate. Most often, the funeral service practitioner contacted to assist with transportation (removal) services are local, often know the family whose loved one has died, and are often able to assist them at these difficult times. Generally speaking, the funeral practitioner is the family's local contact which often gives the family comfort to know things are being handled by someone they know and trust and yet still maintain the professionalism needed to assist the OCME. On many occasions when an autopsy is not ordered and transportation services to Augusta are not required, the local funeral service practitioner will transport the remains to their facility where they will shelter the remains until a Deputy Medical Examiner is able to complete their examination and necessary tests.

It was April 28, 2011, I made this same testimony in front of the same committee where our reimbursement from the OCME had not increased since 1998. We were successful in 2011 getting the fee's increased and we were supported by the OCME. In short, practitioners have been overlooked in many budgets from the OCME. Times have changed and costs to provide these very valuable services have increased. These costs have increased so much that when we provide transport from the Bangor Region we are actually providing this service at a loss.

Some factors that should be taken into consideration include: the cost of a removal vehicle in 2011 was \$24,000 and today is over \$30,000 if you can find one to purchase. Licensing fees for Funeral Practitioners, Funeral Service Establishments and Funeral Attendants have all gone up since 2011, as well as new requirements imposed for training for all licenses. The costs of labor, fuel and insurance, as well as the cost of goods that are used and provided as part of the support service to the OCME have increased across the board. I have had the unfortunate circumstance that an employee was hurt moving and transporting deceased remains for the OCME that went against my business Workers Compensation Insurance.

It shouldn't be too difficult for anyone to appreciate the fact that Maine's funeral service practitioners cannot and should not continue to be expected to provide support service to the OCME at a loss. Like everyone else, they wish to remain in business. It is imperative that reimbursement fees at least cover the expenses incurred by practitioners in support of the OCME.

Funeral practitioners across the state are in hope that the Health and Human Services Committee

can appreciate their dilemma. It's not that practitioners are unwilling to continue to offer support the OCME, but rather a simple fact that they cannot afford to do so at a financial loss. Stop and think about it, it is not just the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner that would be encumbered if practitioners ceased to offer support, but the families who must rely on the services of the OCME, the citizens of Maine.

Thank you for your consideration as we ask for your support for an increase in transportation fees for funeral service practitioners supporting the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner