

# **Jones, Rich & Barnes Funeral Home**

**199 Woodford St.**

**Portland, ME 04103**

## **Testimony in Support of LD 562**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Erik Tiner, and I am a funeral service practitioner here in the great State of Maine. I am a member of the Maine Funeral Directors Association (MFDA) Legislative Committee and serve as Secretary on the Executive Board. The MFDA represents funeral practitioners from across the state. In addition, I manage Jones, Rich & Barnes and Lindquist Funeral Homes, which serve Cumberland County.

I am here today to express my strong support for LD 562 as currently written.

First, I want to acknowledge that Maine's funeral service practitioners and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) have enjoyed a long and productive professional relationship. Since the inception of the OCME, funeral service practitioners have been providing transportation and removal services for human remains to the OCME in Augusta. This system has worked relatively well, with funeral service practitioners being contacted by the OCME to transport human remains from the place of death and assist law enforcement officers as needed.

In many cases, the funeral service practitioners who are called to assist are local and may even know the family of the deceased. This relationship allows us to offer a more personal and supportive service during an incredibly difficult time. However, an increasing number of cases involve individuals with no family to claim them or those from outside the local area. In such instances, funeral service practitioners will shelter the remains at their facilities until a Deputy Medical Examiner can complete their examination and any necessary tests.

In 2011, this committee heard from us about the fact that our reimbursement from the OCME had not increased since 1998. We were successful in advocating for a fee increase at that time, which was supported by the OCME. However, since then, costs have continued to rise, and funeral service practitioners have been left behind in many OCME budget considerations. The realities of inflation and rising operational costs are impacting funeral homes in Maine.

Some key factors to consider include:

- The cost of a removal vehicle in 2011 was \$24,000, but today it exceeds \$35,000.
- Licensing fees for funeral practitioners, funeral service establishments, and funeral attendants have all risen since 2011, as have the costs of training requirements for these licenses.
- Costs for labor, fuel, insurance, and the goods required to support OCME services have all increased substantially.

It should be clear to all that Maine's funeral service practitioners can no longer be expected to provide critical services to the OCME at a loss. Like any business, we must ensure that our costs are covered. The reimbursement fees must be sufficient to meet the expenses incurred by funeral practitioners when supporting the OCME.

Funeral practitioners across the state hope that the Health and Human Services Committee can fully appreciate the dilemma we face. It is not that we are unwilling to continue offering support to the OCME, but the simple fact is that we cannot afford to do so at a financial loss. If funeral service practitioners are unable to continue providing these essential services, the burden will not fall only on the OCME—it will directly affect the families who rely on the OCME's services and the citizens of Maine at large.

Thank you for your consideration. We respectfully ask for your support in increasing transportation fees for funeral service practitioners who assist the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Respectfully,  
Erik Tiner

***Erik Tiner***

Manager, Jones, Rich & Barnes and Lindquist Funeral Homes  
Secretary, Executive Board, Maine Funeral Directors Association