

SENATE BILL 671

C2, M3, J2

5lr3217
CF HB 711

By: **Senator M. Washington**

Introduced and read first time: January 26, 2025

Assigned to: Finance

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Office of Cemetery Oversight – Study of Deathcare and Funeral Practices**

3 FOR the purpose of requiring the Office of Cemetery Oversight, in consultation with the
4 Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland Department of Labor, and the
5 Department of the Environment, to conduct a study of the environmental and public
6 health impacts of deathcare and funeral practices in the State; and generally relating
7 to a study of deathcare and funeral practices.

8 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
9 That:

10 (a) The Office of Cemetery Oversight, in consultation with the Maryland
11 Department of Health, the Maryland Department of Labor, and the Department of the
12 Environment, shall conduct a comprehensive study of the impacts of deathcare and funeral
13 practices on the environment and public health of the State.

14 (b) The study shall:

15 (1) evaluate deathcare and funeral practices in the State, including
16 prevalence rates, geographic distribution, and religious and cultural practices;

17 (2) assess the permitting and licensure processes for facilities and
18 professionals engaged in deathcare and funeral practices; and

19 (3) examine trends regarding the use of cremation and ground burials.

20 (c) The study conducted shall include the study of the following deathcare and
21 funeral practices:

22 (1) embalming;

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



- 1 (2) casket and vault or liner burial;
- 2 (3) mausoleum or columbarium interment or inurnment;
- 3 (4) casket only burial;
- 4 (5) natural or green burial without a casket or with a wood casket
5 alternative;
- 6 (6) cremation or flame cremation;
- 7 (7) alkaline hydrolysis or water cremation;
- 8 (8) resomation or natural water cremation; and
- 9 (9) natural organic reduction or body composting.

10 (d) In examining the impacts of the practices listed in subsection (c) of this
11 section, the study shall include an analysis of:

- 12 (1) the impact of each practice on:
 - 13 (i) land use, including resource consumption and biodiversity
14 implications;
 - 15 (ii) soil and water quality, including risks associated with different
16 types of burial and cremation practices, including scattering cremated remains;
 - 17 (iii) air quality, including greenhouse gas emissions, airborne
18 particulates, and toxic substances;
 - 19 (iv) public health, including risk of exposure to hazardous substances
20 for workers and potential long-term health risks for communities near funeral homes,
21 crematories, or cemeteries;
 - 22 (v) the cost of compliance with environmental standards for
23 providers;
 - 24 (vi) the accessibility and equity in environmentally sustainable
25 deathcare and funeral service sectors;
 - 26 (vii) the potential for job creation and skill development in alternative
27 deathcare and funeral service sectors; and
 - 28 (viii) any opportunities for comprehensive training and use of work
29 crews to gain skills and support the care and maintenance of cemeteries; and

1 (2) permitting and licensure processes, including:

2 (i) establishing and operating facilities such as cemeteries,
3 crematories, and natural burial sites;

4 (ii) emerging or alternative deathcare technologies, including
5 alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction;

6 (iii) gaps or inconsistencies in regulatory frameworks related to
7 environmental and public health protections;

8 (iv) oversight and accountability measures to ensure compliance
9 with environmental and public health standards; and

10 (v) opportunities to streamline or improve licensing processes to
11 support the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

12 (e) The Office of Cemetery Oversight shall:

13 (1) conduct site visits to facilities across the State to collect data of
14 environmental and public health impacts;

15 (2) collect data from other states and jurisdictions with existing
16 regulations or studies on sustainable deathcare and funeral practices to inform the State's
17 approach;

18 (3) solicit input from trade groups and organizations, such as:

19 (i) the Green Burial Council;

20 (ii) the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites;

21 (iii) the Funeral Consumer Alliance;

22 (iv) the Green Burial Alliance of Maryland;

23 (v) organizations representing the funeral industry;

24 (vi) environmental advocacy groups; and

25 (vii) academic institutions with expertise in environmental science,
26 public health, and thanatology; and

27 (4) incorporate feedback from public stakeholders, including feedback from
28 culturally and religiously diverse communities received through public hearings or
29 comment periods.

1 (f) On or before December 1, 2025, the Office of Cemetery Oversight shall submit
2 an interim report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State
3 Government Article, the General Assembly that includes:

4 (1) findings regarding environmental and public health impacts;

5 (2) an inventory of facilities and practices in the State; and

6 (3) any immediate concerns or areas requiring further study.

7 (g) On or before July 1, 2026, the Office of Cemetery Oversight shall submit a
8 final report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government
9 Article, the General Assembly that includes:

10 (1) the results of the study;

11 (2) a detailed analysis of the environmental, public health, and economic
12 impacts of each deathcare and funeral practice;

13 (3) recommended policy changes, including any new regulatory
14 frameworks, permitting processes, or incentives for sustainable deathcare and funeral
15 practices; and

16 (4) potential funding or support mechanisms for expanding
17 environmentally friendly and equitable deathcare options.

18 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July
19 1, 2025.