

2024 Regular Session of the Maryland General Assembly
Testimony Before the House Health and Government Operations Committee
House Bill 756

General Provisions – State Flag – Casket of an Eligible Decedent

Witness: Michael T. Pedone

Position: FAVORABLE

- At a time when divisions in our society seem to be deepening, HB 756 is an opportunity to adopt a new tradition that promotes **unity**.
- The tradition of draping caskets with flags dates to the late 1700s, when flags were used to cover deceased soldiers on the battlefield so that both sides could identify them.
- Today, the tradition of draping a veteran’s casket with the U.S. flag is intended to **honor the memory of the veteran’s service** to his or her country. Federal law requires the provision of U.S. flags for veterans’ caskets. See 38 U.S.C. § 2301.
- Public servants, especially those who give their life in the line of duty, make **significant sacrifices** in the interest of serving our State.
- The death of a public servant should be a **unifying** moment – a moment in which we put aside labels that divide us, like political affiliation, and recognize that we are united by certain common bonds, including our humanity, our mortality, and our **shared identity as Marylanders**.
- We express that shared identity using our state flag, because **Maryland has the best flag of any state**. We show our pride and unity by displaying the Maryland flag at our homes, on apparel, and on almost any surface to which a sticker can be affixed.
- Draping the casket of a deceased public servant with the Maryland flag will **honor the memory of their service to the State**. It will serve as a highly-visible sign of **respect and unity**.
- Casket-sized state flags are not readily commercially available, so it would be unreasonable to expect a decedent’s family to procure one during the short period between a public servant’s death and their funeral service.
- As the officer responsible for State flag protocol, the Secretary of State is the logical choice to manage the provision of Maryland flags for deceased public servants.
- HB 756’s procedural requirements are **nearly identical to the analogous federal law**, 38 U.S.C. § 2301, because it would require:
 - the flag to be given to the decedent’s next-of-kin (or close friend, if no next-of-kin claims it); and
 - flags provided by the Secretary of State to be wholly-produced in the United States.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on HB 756.

Respectfully submitted,
Michael T. Pedone