

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

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

Senate action: Adopted

Read second time: March 18, 2025

CHAPTER _____

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.

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



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

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

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

- (1) the impact of each practice on:
 - (i) land use, including resource consumption and biodiversity implications;
 - (ii) soil and water quality, including risks associated with different types of burial and cremation practices, including scattering cremated remains;
 - (iii) air quality, including greenhouse gas emissions, airborne particulates, and toxic substances;
 - (iv) public health, including risk of exposure to hazardous substances for workers and potential long-term health risks for communities near funeral homes, crematories, or cemeteries;
 - (v) the cost of compliance with environmental standards for providers;
 - (vi) the accessibility and equity in environmentally sustainable deathcare and funeral service sectors;

(vii) the potential for job creation and skill development in alternative deathcare and funeral service sectors; and

(viii) any opportunities for comprehensive training and use of work crews to gain skills and support the care and maintenance of cemeteries; and

(2) permitting and licensure processes, including:

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

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

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

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

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

(e) The Office of Cemetery Oversight shall:

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

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

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

(i) the Green Burial Council;

(ii) the Coalition to Protect Maryland Burial Sites;

(iii) the Funeral Consumer Alliance;

(iv) the Green Burial Alliance of Maryland;

(v) organizations representing the funeral industry;

(vi) environmental advocacy groups; ~~and~~

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

(viii) Maryland State Funeral Directors;

(ix) International Cemetery, Crematory and Funeral Association;

(x) National Funeral Directors and Morticians;

(xi) National Funeral Directors Association; and

(xii) Maryland Crematory and Cremation Association; and

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

(f) On or before ~~December 1, 2025~~ July 1, 2026, the Office of Cemetery Oversight shall submit an interim report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly that includes:

(1) findings regarding environmental and public health impacts;

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

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

(g) On or before ~~July 1, 2026~~ January 1, 2027, the Office of Cemetery Oversight shall submit a final report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly that includes:

(1) the results of the study;

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

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

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

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