

Proponent Testimony on Behalf of SB 168
Submitted by:
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Affiliations:

Blog: Exploring Almost Forgotten Gravesites in the Great State of Ohio:
<https://limestones.blogspot.com/>

Preserving Ohio's Cemeteries – A closed Facebook Group, the creator and admin.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/PreservingOhioCemeteries/>

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**RE: Testimony in support of the passage of [HB/SB 168](#).**

**To The Finance Committee:**

Thank you for this opportunity to share my testimony in support of the passage of House Bill/Senate Bill 168 that further strengthens the Ohio Revised Codes that impact Ohio's cemeteries.

**Ohio Cemeteries in Crisis:**

An untold number of Ohio's cemeteries suffer silently; sitting in various conditions of crisis. The causes can range from being victimized by repeated vandalism attacks to becoming abandoned, and left orphaned, by their owners. Some struggle to receive routine maintenance, and thus rely on private donations for help. Too often cemetery levies fail and calls go out for more community volunteerism.

We know that **All Cemeteries Matter**. All are sacred grounds that deserve our respect. This is true whether they exist in active, inactive, or abandoned states as defined by the Ohio Revised Codes.

Pondering the definition of what is an abandoned cemetery, we might quickly conjure up thoughts of one that has not had a burial in many decades, and fits into the 'lost and forgotten' category. However, that may not always be the case.

Increasingly, it is the larger active and newer cemeteries that have been abandoned by criminally negligent owners. Over time, their unkempt grounds make them easy targets for vandals to enter and linger longer to damage and destroy gravestones and monuments.

Stronger cemetery laws need to be enacted in order to protect and preserve all cemeteries; otherwise their crisis continues unabated in Ohio.

Let's remember that cemeteries are integral and historical components of our communities. They either complement or detract from the nearby villages and cities that surround them.

Sincerely,

Linda Jean Limes Ellis  
Lyndhurst, Ohio

*“Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”*  
*By Sir William Gladstone*

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Sharing supporting documentation:

Cemeteries that are, or have been, in crisis due to becoming abandoned by their owners:

[Fairview Memorial Park – Delaware, Delaware County, Ohio](#)

[Grandview Memorial Park – Ravenna, Portage County, Ohio.](#)

[Floral Hills Memory Gardens – Circleville, Pickaway County, Ohio](#)

[Floral Hills Memory Gardens – Ross County, Ohio](#)

A cemetery that relies on donations for regular maintenance.:

[Centenary Cemetery – Gallipolis, Gallia County, Ohio](#)

Direct Links:

- **Centenary Cemetery – Gallipolis, Gallia County, Ohio:**

<http://galliahometownherald.com/blog/2014/05/19/donations-being-taken-for-the-centenary-cemetery/>



“Cemetery Maintenance is funded by donations”

- **Fairview Memorial Park – Delaware, Ohio:**

<https://www.10tv.com/article/cemetery-fraud-victims-look-buy-fairview-memorial-park-after-owners-sentenced>

- **Floral Hills Memory Gardens – Ross County, Ohio**

<http://www.chillicothe Gazette.com/story/news/2014/05/10/few-respond-to-help-at-floral-hills-community-cleanup-/8947189/>

- **Floral Hills Memory Gardens – Circleville, Pickaway County, Ohio:**

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2016/04/03/volunteers-struggle-to-maintain-abandoned-cemeteries.html>

- **Grandview Memorial Park – Ravenna, Portage County, Ohio.**

<http://www.record-courier.com/news/20170618/area-funeral-homes-deal-with-fallout-from-cemetery>

Rep. Dick Stein Press Release:

<http://www.ohiohouse.gov/dick-stein/press/house-approves-legislation-updating-ohios-cemetery-laws>

COLUMBUS -

“State Representative Dick Stein (R-Norwalk) today applauded the passage of legislation he sponsored that updates Ohio law relating to cemeteries in an effort to reflect current practices and relieve some upkeep and maintenance costs for local governments.

The Cemetery Restoration and Improvement Act, House Bill 168, primarily establishes a cemetery grant program, codifying recommendations presented by the Ohio Cemetery Law Task Force Report and Recommendations in 2014. Supported by the Department of Commerce, and the Division of Real Estate and Professional Licensing, the bill provides an opportunity for local cemeteries to renovate and restore their properties through funds from burial permits issued in the state. The grant program would provide relief to local governments, such as townships, which are required to maintain and operate not-for-profit cemeteries.

“I am pleased that today the House passed House Bill 168 and that it will be sent over to the Senate for consideration,” Rep. Stein said. “This bill will help local governments better manage and maintain their cemeteries. If the bill becomes law, funds will be available for improvements that will honor the passing of all those held within their gates.”

House Bill 168 also allows cemetery trust funds to be bonded or insured through an appropriate policy in accordance with the Ohio Uniform Prudent Investor Act.

Additional provisions in the bill include:

- Allowing the Division of Real Estate and Professional Licensing to investigate a cemetery that has ceased operation in order to appoint a temporary receiver or trustee
- Requiring a cemetery to maintain electronic or paper records about interment, entombment, or inurnment right owners and records indicating a deceased's name, place of death, and date and location of interment, entombment, or inurnment

Supported by the Ohio Township Association, the Ohio Cemetery Association, the Ohio Funeral Directors Association and the Catholic Conference, the legislation will help Ohio's townships maintain the more than 2,400 cemeteries in the state.

House Bill 168 will now go to the Senate for further consideration.”