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**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 224
Ohio House Committee on Civil Justice**

Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski and members of the committee: my name is Chip Billow, and I am the President and CEO of Billow's Celebrations, Cremations, and Funerals in Northeast Ohio. Our main facility is in Akron and we also have a chapel in Cuyahoga Falls. We are a family-owned business that has been serving Northeast Ohio for nearly 150 years and I have been a licensed funeral director for 43 years.

I am testifying before you today as a proponent of Senate Bill 224. The bill cleans up outdated portions of Ohio law governing funerals, provides greater flexibility and oversight in our profession, and allows us as licensed professionals to better assist grieving families in their time of greatest need. The bill makes many positive changes to Ohio law and I will touch on just a few of them.

Assisting Grieving Consumers in Their Time of Need

Death is not an easy time for anyone and our professionals across Ohio deal with grieving families every single day of the week. This bill makes several changes to Ohio law that will permit funeral directors to take action on behalf of consumers if the consumer permits us to do so:

- **Endorsement of Consumer Checks:** Several years ago, Ohio adopted direct deposit protections which required consumers' preneed checks to be written directly to the insurance company or preneed trustee instead of being run through the funeral home. This legislation would add a provision to Ohio's preneed law which would allow a funeral home that receives a preneed payment from a consumer in error to endorse the check over to the trust company or insurance company rather than having to compel the consumer to rewrite the check.
- **Fetal Death Certificates:** When a fetal death occurs under 20 weeks, current Ohio law allows *only* the parents to apply for a fetal death certificate. The bill simply adds a provision *permitting* funeral directors to request a fetal death certificate on behalf of the family.

Streamlining and Updating Funeral Regulations and Requirements; Reciprocity

In an effort to streamline record keeping and other requirements for funeral homes and crematories, Senate Bill 224:

- allows crematories to dispose of copies of receipts signed by consumers after holding them for at least ten years from the date of cremation; current law requires us to hold those indefinitely.
- eliminates outdated requirements for signage inside of our facilities;

- requires those who are licensed funeral directors in other states, who wish to be licensed in Ohio, to be “in good standing” when they apply for a license here;
- permits us to utilize purple lights for funeral processions so that we can distinguish ourselves from emergency vehicles or tow trucks on Ohio roads. Purple lights are used in other states, but not yet permitted in Ohio.

Echoing the comments today from others, this bill has gone through a great deal of debate and discussion in the Ohio Senate and the bill before you is a very comprehensive, yet very non-controversial piece of legislation. There was language included in this bill during deliberations in the Ohio Senate dealing with preneed funeral contracts and unclaimed funds. As a practitioner, I do believe there should be some statutory provisions required on unclaimed funds. However, others testifying today will outline minor modifications that we seek on this issue before you pass Senate Bill 224 as the current language has the potential to inadvertently cause an unnecessary administrative burden on thousands of Ohio funeral homes.

Our industry has sought many of these changes for years and it will be a significant help to our profession and Ohio consumers if these reforms are adopted. We are hopeful the committee will be able to complete your work on this bill before departing for the summer recess. Therefore, on behalf of the thousands of funeral directors and employees across Ohio who provide services to Ohio families each and every day, we ask for you to favorably adopt Senate Bill 224.

Chairman Hillyer and Members of the Committee: Thank you very much for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.