

Good afternoon, Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Martin and Members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

My name is Jon Rettig, Sr. and I am a licensed funeral director and embalmer for over 45 years in the State of Ohio. We own and operate three funeral homes, serving the communities of Leetonia, Columbiana, and East Palestine in Columbiana County. I am also a certified crematory operator, and we own and operate a licensed crematory in Columbiana.

I am here today to address some concerns with Substitute House Bill 509. The profession of funeral service has changed drastically over the past 10 years. Today, more and more consumers in the State of Ohio are choosing options such as pre-arranged and prefunded funeral arrangements and services utilizing cremation as their final disposition. Because of these changing consumer preferences and because of unethical crematory operators in the past, legislation that further protects consumers who choose cremation as their final disposition. If this bill were to take effect in its current form, we would lose the ability to regulate cremation and those who operate crematories in the State of Ohio. Our current laws and rules are in line with nationally recognized standards and make Ohio a leader in consumer protection.

After some preneed scandals in our State and throughout the United States, meaningful legislation through House Bill 49 which was enacted by the 132nd General Assembly and amended by House Bill 166 in the 133rd General Assembly was passed. This legislation created the Ohio Preneed Recovery Fund as well as other good consumer protections. To date, the fund has aided 22 consumers with reimbursements of \$125,456.03. I point out these two areas to show that the funeral profession feels strongly about good consumer protection and have worked hard with our legislators to achieve this.

Some of the other unintended consequences are as follows:

The combination of the licenses removes the choice of an applicant who desires only one license type. For example, many applicants are second career individuals, and they may only wish to pursue the funeral directors only license.

The combination of the apprentice certification is a financial burden for those applicants who desire only one license type. This proposed legislation requires education that may go unutilized.

The combination of the license grants a grandfathered licensee privileges to perform a scope of work without experience or training. The funeral director with no educational or work experience in embalming would have authority to practice.

The reduction of the apprenticeship to twelve months may not be enough for embalming and funeral directing instruction.

Continuing education hours reduced from 18 to 12 hours over a two-year period may not be able to cover the ever-changing laws, processes, and requirements.

If the crematory operator permit is eliminated, it will be extremely difficult to regulate the building and not the individual operator. There was a recent situation near Cincinnati where a crematory was

destroyed by fire through an operator mistake. This could become more of a problem with non-trained individuals operating crematories.

The crematory operators permit enacted in 2018 was based on extremely horrible situations that were happening across the country, including Ohio.

The fees reduction from \$200 to \$100 would make the Embalmers and Funeral Directors Board no longer self-sustaining. The Board has not seen an embalmer or funeral director license fee nearly this low since 2003.

An Ohio resident was recently convicted of 31 charges who presented himself as a licensed funeral director but also did embalming. This was a case that impacted over 120 families by an unlicensed and unqualified individual.

The responsibilities of a funeral director have broadened to having knowledge in accounting, business, building maintenance, safety measures, grief counselor, social worker and many more.

With the educational requirements being reduced, there will most certainly be unintended consequences to the people of Ohio.

With all of these concerns, it is worth noting that I understand the General Assembly's desire to streamline and improve licensure requirements in the State of Ohio, where appropriate and also ensure well-qualified individuals from out of state can be licensed quickly. There currently is a rule pending before CSI reducing the required years of experience needed for a reciprocal license by half from 10 years to 5 years. This was done after significant consultation with industry professionals.

Last year, your colleagues in the Ohio House proposed recommendations that led to the development of House Bill 509. The bill left the House in a form that I strongly supported. I know that the Senate report is a well-intended effort to streamline licensure in Ohio. However, I urge the General Assembly to hear not only my testimony, but also the testimony of the Ohio Funeral Directors Association, as the changes proposed to my profession in Substitute House Bill 509 may unintentionally upend the work of the thousands of individuals who currently work here and those that ultimately seek to work here every day.

Thank you, Chairman Johnson, and member of the Committee, for your attention to this important matter today. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.