



OHIO FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Health Committee

May 14, 2025

Senator Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee - thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Tracy McAdams and I serve as Secretary/Treasurer with the Ohio Funeral Directors Association (OFDA). Since 1881, the OFDA has provided innovative programs, leadership, and excellence in services provided to its membership. As one of the largest state associations for funeral professionals in the nation, representing more than 900 funeral homes in the state, OFDA has become a conduit for promoting the funeral profession and leading the field in education standards.

I would like to address several proposed amendments to Amended Substitute House Bill 96 related to funeral practices in Ohio, all of which aim to improve the service and experience for both Ohio families and the funeral profession.

Travel Protection Plans

Currently, Travel Protection Plans are presented separately from preneed funeral contracts. Travel Protection Plans assist families in transporting family members when a death occurs 75 miles or more from the legal residence, and service providers arrange to transport decedents back home for funeral services. Travel Protection Plans are not listed as a line item on preneed contracts but are offered as an additional plan when preneed funeral contracts are funded. This is explained to families by funeral professionals, emphasizing that the funding for the Travel Protection Plan is separate from the preneed contract.

Clarifying the language surrounding prepaid funeral plans will benefit both funeral homes and families, ensuring transparency and better understanding. Keeping travel protection plans separate from preneed contracts provides a two-fold benefit: it safeguards the consumer's interests while allowing funeral homes to maintain clear and accurate contracts.

Funeral Director-Only Certification Program

We strongly support any well-planned expedited *optional* pathway to funeral director-only licensure. This program will benefit both the profession and Ohio's workforce by creating an efficient path to licensure for funeral directors, especially those who may be seeking second careers after retirement from fields such as education, healthcare, and law enforcement.

This initiative will provide three key benefits:

1. Funeral professionals will gain education through self-paced, online learning, specific to the funeral profession.

2. Apprentices will benefit from consistent, high-quality instruction that may not always be provided by the funeral home. Additionally, the uniform education provided through the program will assist in apprentices' preparation for national and state board exams, which are crucial for licensure.
3. Apprentices will receive the benefit for their investment in education; a one-year reduction in their apprenticeship, which will help Ohio's workforce gain licensees quicker.

Cremation in Religious Exemption Language

Ohio is experiencing an increasing diversity in cultural and religious burial and cremation practices. Any language that helps funeral professionals navigate these diverse rites strengthens the trust between funeral homes and the communities they serve. Clear communication and understanding of cultural and religious preferences in cremation and burial practices is key to fostering stronger relationships with families.

Cremation Authorization: Removal of Mandatory Witness Signature

The removal of the mandatory *witness* signature for cremation authorization is critical, particularly in cases where funeral arrangements are not made in person by the next-of-kin who is making arrangements for their loved one. Often, there is uncertainty about who is signing the required documents when signed remotely, and this change will streamline the process for families and funeral directors. This is especially important in an age where electronic authorizations are increasingly common, particularly when next-of-kin are unable to travel to the funeral home.

Ohio Mortuary Operational Response Team Assistance

The Ohio Mortuary Operational Response Team is a mass fatality response team made up of a diverse group of professionals all with the common goal of responding and assisting local coroners, medical examiners, and emergency management agencies in the identification and the return of human remains to their loved ones following a mass fatality or post fatality incident. The OMORT team maintains an inventory of mortuary response equipment that can support site recovery operations, temporary morgue operations, data collection and analysis, and information resources to assist families in the grief process. The team and equipment can be rapidly deployed and arrive on a scene within hours of request.

To properly serve the state during mass fatality incidents, the team must be current in training and the equipment utilized must be up-to-date and adequately maintained. OFDA is supporting OMORT's request for \$75,000 per fiscal year to assist OMORT's training and equipment maintenance which was included in Amended Substitute House Bill 96.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these amendments. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.