

October 6, 2011

The Honorable Tom Berry
Chair, Economic Affairs Interim Committee
Helena, Montana
VIA E-MAIL

Re: HB 525 Review – **Montana Board of Funeral Service**

Dear Chairman Berry and Committee Members:

First, please accept my most sincere apologies for not being with you. When the EAIC meeting was rescheduled from next week back to this week, I knew that I was going to have some difficulty getting things worked out, as I had already scheduled three weeks of travel, business and personal, beginning September 19, ending tomorrow evening. And family health issues while traveling back east have further complicated things. I'm currently in Traverse City, MI, participating in a meeting of state execs for community banking organizations.

You have always appreciated my brevity, and I will not disappoint you on this issue. **On behalf of the members of the Montana Funeral Directors Association, let me state unequivocally that we see an overwhelmingly compelling state interest in having a Board of Funeral Service safeguard the public health and protect consumers.**

When a Montanan is interacting with an owner or employee of a mortuary, crematory, cemetery or other provider of goods and services related to the ending of a life, it is almost always at a time of considerable stress. Sensitive decisions must be made by people who are likely in a very emotional and vulnerable condition. It only makes good common sense that there be a diverse group of dispassionate individuals available to redress grievances which will rarely but inevitably arise from this unique service for our citizens.

Without doubt, several issues deliberated before the Board throughout its history have been sensitive, significant and contentious. The presence of those issues and deliberations alone is reason enough to justify the board's existence. We feel strongly that a board is the appropriate place where people with expertise can deliberate important issues in a more reflective atmosphere than the "bright lights" and crush of business that faces our biennial legislative sessions.

Finally, there is a large body of state statute and regulation that have been developed by Montanans for Montanans that should be applied and interpreted by Montanans.

As for the association providing licensing and regulation, we would be very opposed to that idea. The Board of Funeral Service, with its diverse makeup and the imprimatur of the state, is the best source for these functions.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment, and look forward to responding to any further inquiries that the committee may have.

Sincerely,

Steve Yeakel, CAE
Executive Director
Montana Funeral Directors Association