



Informs ■ Educates ■ Advocates

March 22, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
H-204 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-221 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Time-sensitive request for additional legislation identifying deathcare workers amongst essential critical infrastructure workers

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your continued efforts to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus and provide relief from its impacts. As Congress considers further legislative responses to this unfolding national emergency, we urge you to consider the critical role our mortuaries, cemeteries and crematories play in responding to pandemics.

The undersigned organizations represent all aspects of the deathcare industry, including funeral homes, cemeteries, and crematories. Deathcare plays a vital, if often overlooked, part of the public health of our nation. During a pandemic, such as COVID-19, or any mass-fatality disaster, deathcare represents a critical part of the public/private partnership that will help our nation heal and recover.

We applaud the critical steps the federal government has taken to limit the spread of COVID-19; to mitigate the impact of illness, suffering and death; and to sustain critical infrastructure and key resources in the United States. However, it is a sad inevitability that, as we have seen in other countries, there will be mass-fatalities, and it is our members who serve on the frontlines – dealing with deaths from other causes; quarantine and illness within their own families and staff; and additional COVID-19 deaths, which might overload their capabilities.

This vital role places deathcare professionals at an extremely high-risk for exposure to sources of COVID-19 as they care for and prepare the deceased for burial or cremation.

As you know, on March 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued guidance that classified mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers." This underscores the vital role funeral directors and others who work in deathcare (such as the "Workers who coordinate with other organizations to ensure the proper recovery, handling, identification, transportation, tracking, storage, and disposal of human remains" noted in the DHS guidance) play in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deathcare professionals stand ready to provide meaningful assistance to our nation by caring for the dead and their grieving families. **To help deathcare professionals in communities throughout the nation continue to *safely* care for the dead while offering comfort to those who grieve, we**

thank you for your attention to three critical issues as you craft additional legislation to address this crisis:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) availability and access:

In order to perform essential public health tasks, deathcare workers must have access to PPEs. Caring for the body of an individual who has died of COVID-19 puts funeral directors and embalmers at risk for exposure to the virus. We ask that you include deathcare workers as an “essential service” so they can have priority access to PPEs.

2. Exemption from quarantine orders:

We request exemption from federal and state “lock down” and “shelter in place” orders and mandatory business closures. We urge federal guidance to clarify that “essential infrastructure” and “essential businesses and services” includes deathcare providers – which provide essential services that are critical to the health, safety and sanitation of communities – as well as suppliers of funeral products to funeral homes, cemeteries and crematories.

3. Priority for vaccines:

Due to the high risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus while caring for the bodies of those who die of COVID-19, we urge that deathcare workers be included in the top-tier of essential services to receive a vaccine when it becomes available. In 2008 when faced with the H1N1 Pandemic, CDC elevated “Mortuary Service Providers” to the Tier II level for vaccine prioritization. There are six tiers to the system with the most critical workers and personnel in Tiers I, II, and III. We ask for similar consideration for our members with a COVID-19 vaccine as we confront this latest pandemic.

On behalf of the more than 200,000 deathcare professionals in the United States, we stand ready, as always, to care for the dead and the families left behind.

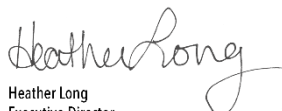
Sincerely,



Christine Pepper, MBA, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
National Funeral Directors Association

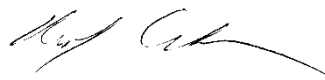


NATIONAL AND STATE FUNERAL SERVICE ASSOCIATIONS

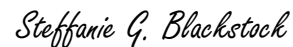


Heather Long
Executive Director
Arizona Funeral Cemetery and Cremation Association

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Executive Director
Arizona Funeral, Cemetery
and Cremation Association



Robert J. Acherman
Executive Director
California Funeral Directors
Association



Steffani G. Blackstock
Executive Director
Colorado Funeral Directors
Association



John Cascio

John F. Cascio
Executive Director
Connecticut Funeral Directors
Association



Barbara Kemmis

Barbara Kemmis
Executive Director
Cremation Association of
North America



John Ricco

John Ricco, CAE
Executive Director
Florida Cemetery, Cremation &
Funeral Association



Erin Longmire

Erin Longmire
Executive Director
Funeral Service & Cremation
Alliance of Wisconsin



Lee Wiensch

Lee Wiensch, CFRE
Executive Director
Funeral Service Foundation



Christie Carpenter

Christie Carpenter
Executive Director
Georgia Funeral Directors
Association



Mary Carey

Mary Carey
Executive Director
Illinois Funeral Directors
Association



David "Andy" Clayton

David "Andy" Clayton
Executive Director
Indiana Funeral Directors
Association



Nadira Baddeliyanage

Nadira Baddeliyanage
Executive Director
International Cemetery,
Cremation & Funeral
Association



Michael Lanotte
Executive Director
New York State Funeral
Directors Association



Melissa S. Sullivan
Executive Director
Ohio Funeral Directors
Association



Gordon F. Welch
Executive Director
Oklahoma Funeral Directors
Association



Kathleen K. Ryan, Esquire
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Funeral
Directors Association



Rob Paterkiewicz
CAE, IOM
Selected Independent Funeral
Homes



Rion Rampey
Executive Director
South Carolina Funeral
Directors Association



Tammy Kerr
Executive Director
South Dakota Funeral
Directors Association



Randy Nash, Jr., CCO
President
Tennessee Funeral Directors
Association



Joe Rudd, CFSP
President
Utah Funeral Directors
Association



Gregory Camp

Gregory Camp
Executive Director
Vermont Funeral Directors &
Embalmers Association

Lacy Whittaker

Lacy Whittaker
Executive Director
Virginia Funeral Directors
Association

Caroline Bowers

Caroline Bowers
Executive Director
Wisconsin Funeral Directors
Association

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Chris Trainor
President
Batesville

Debbie Dodge

Debbie Dodge
President
The Dodge Company

Tim Walker

Tim Walker
Doric Products
Classic Metal Vaults



David McComb

David McComb
CEO
Eagle's Wings Air &
Inman Shipping Worldwide

Robert Bukala

Robert Bukala
President & CEO
Foundation Partners Group

Kris Seale

Kris Seale
President & CEO
Funeral Directors Life



Steve Shaffer

Stephen M. Shaffer
CEO & President
Homesteaders Life Company



Steve Gackenbach

Steve Gackenbach
Group President,
Memorialization
Matthews International



Bob Hoaglund

Bob Hoaglund
VP of Industry Relations
The Messenger Co.



Knut A. Olson

Knut A. Olson
President & Chief Executive
Officer
NGL Insurance Group



William M. Hamilton

William M. Hamilton
Chairman & CEO
NorthStar Memorial Group,
LLC



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Jay Dodds
Chief Operating Officer
Park Lawn Corporation



Lance Ray

Lance Ray
Exec. Vice President
Pierce Chemical



Jill Karn

Jill Karn
Chief Operating Officer
Pierce Mortuary Colleges, Inc.



Paul R.D. Haarer

Paul R.D. Haarer
CEO
Pinnacle Funeral Service



Dennis Smith

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Don Robinson

Dennis L. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
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Rich Darby
Chief Operating Officer
Trigard

Ken Moore
Senior Vice President
Sales and Marketing
Wilbert Funeral Services