

Mueller-Bies
FUNERAL HOMES
Family Owned & Operated for Four Generations

September 20, 2023

Minnesota Department of Health
85 7th Pl E
St. Paul, MN 55101

To Whom it May Concern,

As the owners and operators of Mueller-Bies Funeral Home, we wholeheartedly endorse and support the passage of HF 2509 / SF 2611 to address the critical staffing shortage facing the funeral industry.

As the population grows and the metro area expands, deaths not only increase in number but come from locations across a wide geographical area. Despite our status as a midsize, local funeral provider in the northeast metro, it is not uncommon for us to receive requests for removals in locations from Woodbury to Wyoming, from Brooklyn Park to St. Louis Park. It is difficult to service this need in a timely fashion during normal business hours, much less after. A single funeral director simply cannot respond to all these requests alone at night in a reasonable timeframe. Families are forced to wait long, painful hours for the funeral director to arrive. Bodies are left sitting in nursing homes and in hospital beds. Some providers simply let bodies sit in hospital morgues for days, even weeks.

The mortician staffing shortage is real, and acute. The University of Minnesota Mortuary Science program graduates less than two dozen people per year, and 50% of new licensees are out of the industry within five years. Funeral providers desperately try to fill their own shortages by recruiting licensed directors from their competitors, creating a vicious game of musical chairs that doesn't actually solve the problem, but just moves it from one provider to another. The state's largest cremation provider is known to tell families that there is a ten-day wait simply to get the process started, due to their severe understaffing.

Licensed funeral directors have the responsibility of conducting funeral arrangements, embalming and preparing bodies, and conducting funerals; by law, they are the only people who can perform these functions. When they are additionally required to spend precious hours driving back and forth across the metro or waiting in a loading dock for overworked hospital staff, they don't have the ability to perform those other duties in a timely manner. Add to that the need to respond to after-hours calls and embalm bodies overnight in between full workdays, and it is no wonder so many licensees burn out and leave the industry so quickly. As the population grows and ages, and becomes more widespread geographically, these problems will only be exacerbated.

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A sensible way to help alleviate the acute need for additional staffing in the funeral industry is to allow for supervised, non-licensed personnel to transfer bodies from the place of death to the funeral home. This has the immediate benefit of freeing up scarce licensed funeral directors to perform other duties that, by law, only they can perform. It would allow for greater responsiveness, reducing the time families are forced to wait for someone to arrive. It would help free precious space in hospital morgues, as staff could be dispatched to retrieve bodies while licensed funeral directors are otherwise occupied. It would greatly improve quality of life for the licensed funeral directors, as they could rely on other staff and subcontractors to help respond to death calls after hours instead of being forced to go days without sleep to meet the round-the-clock demands currently placed on them. It would likely lead to less burnout and higher retention of licensed directors by the industry as a whole, as they would have the flexibility to respond to family matters and other responsibilities while sharing their work responsibilities with others.

A common argument by those opposed to nonlicensed body removals is that “unqualified” people would be able to remove and transfer bodies. This is, frankly, nonsense. Any funeral provider who is dispatching someone to make removal of a body is investing that person with their trust and with the reputation and good standing of the business. We are the ones responsible for people handling bodies in our name, and we will be the ones to make sure the people who do so are qualified. We have even less desire to have “unqualified” people handling bodies in our name than the state does, as we are the ones who would suffer for incompetence.

Further, funeral homes have always been allowed to have unlicensed personnel accompany a licensed funeral director on removals. These unlicensed coworkers often have conducted hundreds, if not thousands, of removals alongside licensed directors, and are thus often more “qualified” to do so than the junior funeral director accompanying them.

Further, throughout the duration of the COVID emergency, unlicensed personnel were granted full authority by the State of Minnesota to make removals, and did so without incident. The proposed law has already been field-tested and proven to work. There is no legitimate standing for the state to argue that what worked without issue during the emergency is unacceptable now that it has passed. There is no logical reason that Minnesota cannot follow the path of neighboring Wisconsin, North Dakota, and South Dakota, and allow funeral homes to delegate this responsibility to those they have determined are capable of performing the duty.

Minnesota is the only state to require its licensed funeral directors to hold a four-year degree. By requiring them by law to assume more duties than the number of licensed directors in the state can physically perform in an acceptable timeframe, Minnesota is harming the client families it believes it’s protecting, and forcing highly trained funeral directors out of the industry

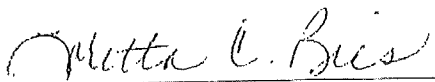
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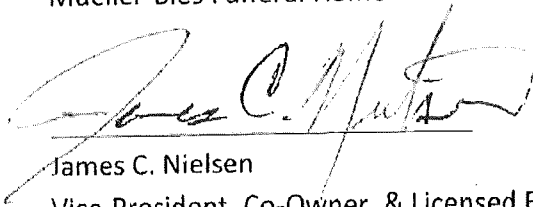
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due to burnout. HF 2509 / SF 2611 should be passed into law to allow the funeral providers to spread the removal responsibilities among their staff, properly serve the families placing trust in them, meet the needs of their communities, and retain their workforce.

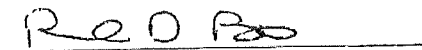
Sincerely,



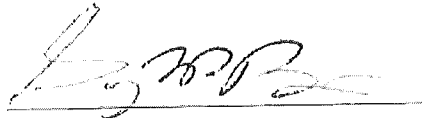
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