

**Testimony of  
Philip K. Douma, Executive Director  
Michigan Funeral Directors Association**

**In Support of House Bill 4437  
House Regulatory Reform Committee  
May 13, 2020**

On behalf of nearly 1200 funeral directors serving in 500 funeral homes across Michigan, I wish to express our strong support for House Bill 4437.

To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken the lives of nearly 4,700 of our fellow Michiganders. This staggering and tragic statistic has sadly spotlighted the critical importance of the proper care, handling, transportation and disposition of these decedents, in a dignified and respectful manner that protects public health and sanitation, while at the same time serving the needs of those grieving families. House Bill 4437 was introduced nearly a year before the first COVID-19 patient was diagnosed in Michigan. But it clearly forecast that emerging pathogens are among the reasons that education standards for funeral professionals should be enhanced.

Beyond the present crisis, however, the profession is facing other new and increasingly complex challenges. It must be remembered that the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is not the first, and likely will not be the last, virulent infectious agent to recently attack the human population. MERS and SARS were harbingers of the current strain. Emerging pathogens may be the new normal.

In addition, increasing and more complex federal and state regulations, emerging methods of final disposition, and rising expectations of grieving families have all combined to necessitate enhancing current education requirements.

Currently, Michigan is one of only ten states, and none located in the upper Midwest, that has no continuing education requirement for funeral service professionals.

H.B. 4437 would bring Michigan in line by requiring four hours per year of continuing education for license renewal; half of which must be in eleven specifically prescribed topic areas such as funeral ethics, best practices, and communicable diseases including transmission and sterilization techniques.

Regarding initial licensure, currently a licensee must have three years of post-secondary education, which includes graduation from an accredited mortuary science program, passing national and state exams, and practical experience in the profession. Our regional states of Ohio and Minnesota each require a bachelor's degree for licensure.

House Bill 4437 would, beginning in 2024, add a requirement that an applicant for a new mortuary science license possess a bachelor's degree. The applicant could obtain the bachelor's degree in any field of study, including, or in addition to, mortuary school. Some mortuary science education programs, such as Wayne State University's, automatically grant bachelor's degrees to those completing their programs, so those graduates can fulfill both requirements simultaneously.

With the proper and respectful handling and disposition of COVID-19 decedents among the state's paramount public health concerns, we must ensure that funeral service professionals are well-prepared to meet tomorrow's challenges. Funeral professionals, while not first responders are the last responders—not on the frontline, but the last line of public health defense. We respectfully ask for your support of this important legislation.

# MFDA

MICHIGAN FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

*Generations of Caring*

*The nation's oldest Funeral  
Directors Association –  
serving our members  
and the public for  
139 years*

## **H.B. 4437: Funeral Service Education Sponsor: Rep. Rodney Wakeman**

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### **Background:**

This bill updates education requirements for funeral directors to keep pace with changing times and situations demanding more of the professionals who serve families at such a vulnerable time. As many professions undergo changes at various intervals throughout time due to external factors such as technological innovations, emerging public health threats (i.e.: coronavirus or ebola), changing laws and regulations, and complex family dynamics, funeral service is currently at that crossroads. To raise professional standards, House Bill 4437 is a thoughtful approach to ensure that the professionals handling human remains and working with grieving families, are equipped with the knowledge to protect public health, manage complex family and legal matters, in addition to handling human and cremated remains in a dignified and respectful manner.

Currently, funeral directors are able to obtain a mortuary science license after three years of education, which includes graduation from an accredited mortuary science program, passing national and state exams, and practical experience in the profession. Michigan is the only Great Lakes state that does not currently require any form of continuing education.

### **House Bill 4437:**

H.B. 4437 makes the following changes:

- Beginning in 2024, adding a requirement that an applicant for a new mortuary science license possess a bachelor's degree. The applicant could obtain a bachelor's degree in any field of study, in addition to mortuary school. Some mortuary science education programs however, such as Wayne State University's, automatically grant bachelor's degrees to those completing their programs, so those graduates can fulfill both the mortuary science education and bachelor's degree requirements simultaneously.
- Requires four hours a year of continuing education for license renewal; half of which must be in specific topics such as funeral ethics, best practices, and communicable diseases including transmission and sterilization techniques.
- Requires the reporting of a funeral establishment's owners, officers, directors or members to LARA.

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### *Generations of Caring*

- Adds a reciprocal enforcement provision to emphasize that a violation of the PrePaid Funeral and Cemetery Sales Act is a violation of the Occupational Code.
- Allows cremated remains that have been unclaimed for a minimum of six months since the date of cremation to be retrieved by a more remote relative than those who were initially entitled to possession.
- Requires additional reporting to LARA that includes disclosure of name and addresses of shareholders, officers, directors, partners, members, and managers who have an ownership interest in a funeral home. Additionally, requires reporting a change in ownership of a funeral home to LARA within 30 days of change.
- Allows for license reciprocity when the following occur:
  - Held or previously held a mortuary science or dual licenses in another state for not less than five (5) years.
  - Completed an accredited mortuary science program.
  - Passes all required parts of a national or international association of funeral service licensing boards approved by the department and the regulating board.
  - Allows the department to refuse to issue a license based on evidence that his or her license was suspended, revoked, or limited at any time.
- Clarifies the requirement that supervision and responsibility for the transportation and storage of human remains reside with a licensed funeral director, except for:
  - The transportation or storage of a dead human body that is the subject of an anatomical gift.
  - Transportation by a county medical examiner.
  - Removal from the place of death by police, fire, or other emergency personnel.
- When reasonable efforts have been made to obtain authorization from person(s) with authority of disposition and more than 48 hours have elapsed since time of death, authorization to embalm is not required.

For additional information, please contact:

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