

Governor's Re-Opening Task Force
May 28, 2020
Draft Guidance Proposal for Re-Opening
NH Funeral Homes
by
New Hampshire Funeral Directors Association

Testimony

Good afternoon, Director Bettencourt and members of the Task Force, my name is Peter Morin. I am the Executive Director of the NH Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association and a licensed NH funeral director and embalmer.

Thank you for asking me to present. I first wish to thank you all for your service and dedication to the people of the State of NH.

New Hampshire Funeral Directors have been key stakeholders in the COVID-19 response. Funeral professionals are on the front line, with other responders and caregivers often at personal risk and exposure. We may be quiet and unassuming, but none the less we are there when and where we are needed. We answer the call when the need arises day or night, weekend, or holiday.

Over the last two years, we have been a part of the DHHS workgroup in updating the NH Mass Fatality Management Plan. We had not anticipated the need to activate it so soon.

Unlike many businesses and groups that have come before this Task Force, funeral service was never "closed." As designated essential workers by the Governor, we continue twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to provide critical services needed by NH families by caring for their deceased loved ones and maintaining public health.

In preparing for and during the pandemic response, we have been in regular communication with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to prepare for a surge, the Emergency Operations Center, and DHHS to keep the funeral directors supplied and supported. Meeting with the Attorney General's Office in addressing the concern regarding deaths of unclaimed, impoverished individuals, and helping families in financial duress experiencing a loss. We have spoken with the NH Hospital Association on the additional capacity to shelter the deceased. The NH Council of Churches as how best to stage and carefully reopen and gaining a regional perspective with regular conference calls with the New England state funeral association executives.

We submitted a letter to the GOFERR Stakeholder Advisory Board regarding the cost funeral directors have incurred to purchase supplies for a potential surge and also the cost to towns for funerals for those who are indigent or in need of help during this time.

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Funeral directors do just that, direct. We are accustomed to guiding groups of people in what are often highly charged emotional circumstances. We have a unique opportunity when we meet with the family when arranging and organizing a tribute for their loved ones—a chance to include them in the importance of adjusting to keep everyone safe.

Also, we can educate and inform the public in obituaries and funeral notices of the new protocols and requirements of safe conduct. Therefore, keeping the public informed as to the conditions and responsibility in participating in funeral services.

There certainly is no playbook for what we are experiencing. This is a new landscape to navigate which affects all families experiencing a death COVID or otherwise

The pandemic has brought many challenges to funeral service and the families we serve. They are unable to grieve together as a community, as we have in the recent past.

Delayed grief, the absence, or postponement of ritual or ceremony and community support may bring an emotional and psychological toll in the future.

Many families have chosen to delay services until limits on group gatherings increase. It is causing a build-up of pending services and final dispositions.

Compounding the situation, are spring burials resulting from winter entombments when deaths occurred in the winter and cemeteries were closed.

The NH Funeral Directors Association is pleased to present draft guidance that we modeled after the retail guidelines that this Economic Re-Opening Task Force has already vetted and issued.

We feel the retail guidance allows funeral service the continuity for implementation for both funeral staff and the public.

We look forward to working with the Task Force, and I welcome your questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter C. Morin