

# Senate Committee on Human Services and Early Childhood

HB 3243 – Indigent Disposition

## SUPPORT – SENATE HEARING TESTIMONY

Prepared by Cascade Funeral Directors, Inc. ( A Family Owned Oregon Business)

My name is Randy Tjaden. I own and operate Cascade Funeral Directors, Inc. We are a family owned Oregon business, operating funeral establishments throughout the Portland metropolitan area and the north Willamette Valley. We are one of the largest death care providers in Oregon and we play a substantial role in the care and disposition of Oregon's indigent decedents. In 2014 there were approximately 400 indigent disposition reimbursement applications filed in our state – 94 of them were handled by my company. As you can see, we have a considerable stake in this matter, providing nearly 25% of our state's indigent disposition services.

### A NEED FOR CHANGE

For many years I have advocated for change in the management and oversight of the Indigent Disposition Fund. Currently, the management of this fund is in the hands of Oregon's Department of Human Services (DHS). I have nothing against DHS, however, they are a very large agency and have huge responsibilities to our citizens and handling the Indigent Disposition Fund has never been high on their priority list. In reviewing the past 15 years, to say that DHS has done a poor job of handling this fund would be a drastic understatement.

Here are a few of the problems we've dealt with in the past:

- Inaccurate billing for the \$20 death certificate filing fee
  - On many occasions invoices were sent to the wrong establishment, creating a clerical nightmare
  - On three separate occasions in the recent years we have been forced to perform an internal audit of our filing fee invoices - this has been very labor intensive and the outcome has never been very successful
- This fund's management has been moved from office to office and desk to desk for many years and it has been nearly impossible for us to reach anyone with any knowledge of the fund or its management.
- There has been very little consistency in the distribution of reimbursement funds. There are times when the fund is managed monthly and funds are distributed in a timely manner, but there are also times when this fund has been ignored for as much as three months and no funds were distributed.
- There is no stability in the amount of reimbursements – they ranged from \$218 to \$650 during 2014

## **IMPROVING THE FUND**

HB 3243 transfers the management and oversight of this fund to the Oregon Mortuary and Cemetery Board (OMCB). The OMCB is a small state agency that already has a working relationship with the death care industry and has a solid working knowledge of how our industry operates. This bill would allow our industry to work together with the OMCB to greatly improve how this fund is managed. Over the past decade or more, I have pleaded for change and this bill allows us that opportunity.

I have asked for:

- Establishing guidelines for the proper use of the fund
  - Guidelines for Funeral Establishments
  - Guidelines to help the Consumer understand the fund
- Detailed procedures including requirements for preparing reimbursement applications
- Regulatory oversight that would ensure the proper use of the fund
- Consistency in the amount of indigent reimbursements
  - ESTIMATES
    - There will be roughly 34,000 deaths in Oregon this year
    - DC filing fees will generate roughly \$200,000 for this fund
    - I'd expect that just over 400 reimbursement applications will be submitted by funeral establishments
    - Reimbursements will average around \$450 per application
  - ACTUAL NUMBERS
    - In 2014 my company filed for indigent reimbursement 94 times
    - Our actual reimbursements ranged from \$218 to \$650
    - Our average reimbursement was \$468
    - Our average aging report time was 63 days, with some as high as 153 days and some as low as 28 days

Because of my company's position in the greater community, I have accepted our role of assisting those who need a little extra help and we will continue to do so. It would be nice to know that, in-turn, we have the cooperation and support of that same greater community.

This legislation would create a needed change in management of this fund and would allow us, the death care industry, to work together with the OMCB to address every one of these issues very effectively.

Thank you for your consideration.

Randy Tjaden, President  
Cascade Funeral Directors, Inc.