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Legislative District 43
Baltimore City and Baltimore County

Committee on Education, Energy,
and Environment

Subcommittees

Chair, Education
Environment

Joint Committees

Chair, on Administrative, Executive,
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The Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal
Bays Critical Areas



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Ordinance 24-0559

FAVORABLE

Testimony of Senator Mary Washington

November 19, 2024

Chair Costello and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Ordinance 24-599 removes crematoriums from the Baltimore City code for funeral homes and cemeteries and no longer permits crematoriums in C2 zoning districts. This ordinance addresses a critical environmental and public health issue: the placement of crematoriums in densely populated neighborhoods.

Cremation was initially contemplated as an occasional use by a funeral home but could now be its primary use, necessitating its regulation and zoning as a separate facility. According to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA), the average US cremation rate was 60% last year and is anticipated to grow to over 80% in the next five years.

It is important to honor our deceased loved ones and ensure they are cared for in their final resting place. Cremation is a standard practice vital to Marylanders. This proposed bill will not curtail this needed service but rather ensure that future use does not come at the expense of the health and wellness of our neighborhoods. The rising popularity of cremation necessitates proactive zoning measures to avoid unsafe developments.

Crematoriums are incinerators, and the National Institutes of Health has confirmed that cremation is an energy-intensive process that releases pollutants, including chemicals that contaminate air, soil, and groundwater. The most significant impact is felt in adjacent areas, disproportionately affecting residents who live near these facilities. The pollutants released during the cremation process can lead to a range of health issues, from respiratory diseases to premature death. This is a serious public health concern.

The disproportionate environmental challenges faced by communities like Baltimore City are well-documented. According to the Maryland Department of the Environment's Environmental Justice Screening Tool, the neighborhood where a proposed crematory may be located ranks in the 94th percentile for vulnerability to environmental hazards compared to other areas in Maryland. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's data further underscores the disproportionate burden faced by this community, ranking it in the 95th percentile for Air Toxics Cancer Risk, the 83rd percentile for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), and the 91st percentile for traffic proximity. Baltimore City's overall environmental justice score is among the worst in the state, reflecting decades of systemic neglect and exposure to harmful pollutants.

The American Lung Association's recent "State of the Air" report highlights that, while Baltimore has seen improvement in smog levels, particle pollution—one of the most harmful pollutants—has worsened. Particle pollution is directly linked to adverse health outcomes, including respiratory diseases, cardiovascular issues, and premature death. Crematory emissions would only exacerbate these existing burdens and worsen the health inequities already present in Baltimore City.

We must take proactive steps to ensure our communities are not further harmed. Environmental justice demands that we prioritize protecting people over process. No one wants an incinerator in their backyard, especially in neighborhoods already facing some of the highest pollution burdens in the country. There is ample space in Maryland to site crematories in areas that do not impose additional risks to health and well-being.

Protecting our air quality, especially in overburdened communities, is not just good policy—it is a moral imperative. The health of our families, children, and elders should never be sacrificed for convenience or profit. We can and must ensure that essential services like cremation are provided without compromising the well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you for your time, and I respectfully request a favorable report on Ordinance 24-0559.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington".

Senator Mary Washington
Maryland's 43rd District