

March 22, 2020

Governor John Carney
Tatnall Building
150 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd South
Dover, DE 19901

Re: Time-sensitive request to use emergency powers to identify deathcare workers amongst essential critical infrastructure workers

Dear Governor Carney:

The Delaware State Funeral Directors Association has been working closely with the National Funeral Directors Association to educate funeral professionals in the state of Delaware about their critical role in responding to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We applaud the critical steps Delaware has taken at your directive to limit the spread of COVID-19; to mitigate the impact of illness, suffering and death; and to sustain critical infrastructure and key resources. However, it is a sad inevitability that, as we have seen in other states, there will be mass-fatalities, and it is our members who serve on the frontlines – dealing with deaths from other causes; quarantine and illness within their own families and staff; and additional COVID-19 deaths, which might overload their capabilities.

As Governor, you know that deathcare plays a vital, if often overlooked, part of the public health of our state. During a pandemic, such as COVID-19, or any mass-fatality disaster, deathcare represents a critical part of the public/private partnership that will help our state heal and recover.

This vital role places deathcare professionals at an extremely high-risk for exposure to sources of COVID-19 as they care for and prepare the deceased for burial or cremation. Deathcare professionals stand ready to provide meaningful assistance to our state by caring for the dead and their grieving families. As you know, on March 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) issued guidance that classified mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers." This underscores the vital role funeral directors and others who work in deathcare (such as the "Workers who coordinate with other organizations to ensure the proper recovery, handling, identification, transportation, tracking, storage, and disposal of human remains and personal effects" noted in the DHS guidance) play in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We ask that you use your emergency powers to ensure deathcare workers are included in any state and/or local guidance or mandatory order identifying deathcare workers amongst essential critical infrastructure workers. This would ensure:

1. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) availability and access:

In order to perform essential public-health tasks, deathcare workers must have access to PPE. Caring for the bodies of individuals who died due to COVID-19 places funeral directors and embalmers at risk for exposure to the virus. We ask that you include deathcare as an "essential service" so deathcare workers receive priority access to PPEs.

2. Exemption from quarantine orders:

We request formal exemption from federal and state "lockdown" and "shelter-in-place" orders, as well as from mandatory business closures. We urge you to clarify that "essential infrastructure" and "essential businesses and services" includes deathcare providers, which provide essential

services that are critical to the health, safety and sanitation of communities, as well as suppliers of funeral products to funeral homes, cemeteries and crematories.

3. Priority for testing and vaccines:

Due to the high risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus while caring for the bodies of those who die due to COVID-19, we urge deathcare workers be included in the top-tier of essential services to receive testing and a vaccine when it becomes available. In 2008, when facing the H1N1 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) elevated "Mortuary Service Providers" to the Tier II level for vaccine prioritization. There were six tiers to the system, with the most critical workers and personnel in Tiers I, II, and III. We ask for similar consideration for our members as a COVID-19 vaccine is developed.

On behalf of our members and the more than one thousand deathcare professionals in Delaware, we are grateful for your leadership and stand ready, as always, to care for the dead and the families left behind.

Sincerely,

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