



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: November 20, 2019

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 518

Thank you Chairman Kapenga and members of the Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations for holding a hearing on SB 518 today. Industry professionals and stakeholders in the funeral service and cremation profession are very concerned about the number of students interested in entering the mortuary school program in Wisconsin. Fifty years ago, Milwaukee Area Technical College's (MATC) Mortuary School – the state's only mortuary school – graduated 40 to 50 funeral directors from the program. The current class enrollment for this year is 16.

One primary and probable reason for dwindling enrollment numbers are the academic requirements placed upon Wisconsin students in relation to their peers in neighboring states and across the country. Aside from the states of Ohio and Minnesota, which require a four-year degree to receive funeral director licensure, Wisconsin is one of a handful of states that require three (total) years of academic instruction to receive the same degree as states which only require two years of academic instruction.

Milwaukee Area Technical College's Mortuary School and industry stakeholders are interested in addressing this issue by reducing the amount of academic instruction required for students studying in the program. As it stands now, in order to be licensed as a Funeral Director, a prospective licensee must have completed 2 academic years of instruction in a recognized college or university in a course of study approved by the examining board, or have equivalent education *and* the person must have satisfactorily completed 9 months or more of instruction in a prescribed course in mortuary science approved by the examining board, among other requirements.

Because prospective licensee students are required to complete 2 years of instruction in a recognized college or university in addition to an approved mortuary school program, they end up being required to complete coursework that is only loosely related to their future profession in order to satisfy this part of the licensing requirements. This extends the time and financial investment that students need to make to become licensed in Wisconsin, while several other states, such as Illinois, do not have this requirement.

This bill would change the requirement of two academic years of instruction from a recognized college or university to a 24 academic credit requirement. In addition, under the bill, a person who has successfully completed an approved mortuary school program would not have to take the pre-certification course prior to receiving their funeral director apprentice license. Taking the pre-



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certification course is redundant and unnecessary for anyone who has successfully completed mortuary school.

Stakeholders and MATC believe that this change will increase the number of students in MATC's Mortuary School program as the program will be more in line with neighboring states and boost MATC's Mortuary School competitiveness with other programs throughout the country.

I think it's also important to note that Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) and the Funeral Service & Cremation Alliance of Wisconsin (FSCA) are supportive of this legislation. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today. I ask that you join Senator Kooyenga and myself in supporting this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.



November 20, 2019

Senator Chris Kapenga
Chair, Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State-Federal Relations
Wisconsin State Capitol

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing, and State-Federal Relations,

My name is Gabriel Schauf and I am the program coordinator for the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) Funeral Service Program. MATC's Funeral Service Program is the only mortuary school in Wisconsin. I am here to testify in support of Assembly Bill 576, which would dramatically help our school educate those interested in funeral service.

MATC's mortuary school program has seen a steady decline in enrollees within the last couple of decades. The current class of students is currently at 16, while at one point, there was a waiting list to enter our school. Our program has already working on the following in attempt to help with the decline in enrollment:

- Streamlining the application and enrollment process
- Providing checklists for students giving specific course information (what to take)
- Funeral Department monitoring of those enrolled and taking courses in preparation for funeral service; connecting with them and assisting them where we can
- Apprentice Training Courses for the State; serves as a feeder for the program
- Marketing throughout the state; funeral home / career-fair marketing materials, social media channels, high-school job fairs and MATC Open Houses

While these have all been helpful in our recruiting efforts, it is clearly not enough. We have found that one of the largest barriers in enrollment of prospective mortuary school students is the amount of prerequisite credits statutorily required to enter the program. Unlike any of our other associate degree programs offered at MATC, including nursing and dental hygienists, the funeral service program requires the completion of 60 prerequisite credits prior to entering the school. 30 of these credits are electives. This puts a tremendous burden on the student, while not providing much in value in preparing them for the funeral-related content of mortuary school. I have provided some examples where this has been an issue with our students.

Assembly Bill 576 will help correct this issue. Wisconsin state statute requires this two year (60 credits) of academic instruction prior to entering our mortuary school program, which is another nine months of course study (31 credits). These requirements impede our ability to recruit prospective students. Aside from the states of Minnesota and Ohio, every other state requires an associate degree or certificate level of education prior to licensure. Wisconsin, however, requires over three years of schooling prior to receiving an associate degree in mortuary science.

Downtown Milwaukee Campus
700 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233-1443

Mequon Campus
5555 West Highland Road
Mequon, WI 53092-1143

Oak Creek Campus
6665 South Howell Avenue
Oak Creek, WI 53154-1107

West Allis Campus
1200 South 71st Street
West Allis, WI 53214-3110

Other schools can achieve the same associate degree for its students in a two year timeframe. Mortuary schools are becoming much more competitive for its each enrollee and students know they can get their mortuary degree elsewhere in a shorter amount of time. Also, our program is losing prospective students to other health services-related professions offered through MATC. Students may be interested in funeral service, but when they hear about all of the prerequisite requirements, they opt to go into the nursing or dental hygienist program.

AB 576 would reduce this amount of prerequisite credits from 60 to 24. As you can see from the curriculum hand out, this will not only decrease the number of elective credits required, but would also increase the amount of core funeral director credits. We feel this will help to better prepare students for their eventual work as licensed funeral directors.

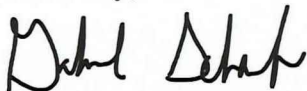
A few years ago, our mortuary school was put on probation by our accrediting body, the American Board of Funeral Service Educators (ABFSE). The reason for our probation was because the passage rate of our students for the national board exam (another requirement of becoming a licensed funeral director in Wisconsin) was not high enough. MATC worked with the ABFSE to correct this issue and has since been accredited and out of probation. A letter from the ABFSE is here for your review.

MATC feels AB 576 will also help in our passage rate of the national board exam. This help would be threefold. First, it would allow MATC to create a more efficient mortuary school program; teaching more funeral related courses instead of non-related electives, better preparing the student for the exam. Second, it would condense the program from over three years to two years, allowing the student a better ability to recall materials learned relative to the exam over that timeframe. We feel these two effects would dramatically increase our students' ability to pass the national board exam. Third, with the ability to increase core funeral director credits, we could now add a National Board Exam Preparation Course, which would allow students to better prepare for the NBE and improve our overall NBE success rates.

At MATC, we want our mortuary school to remain competitive and help students succeed in their dreams of funeral director licensure. We feel AB 576 does this, while not diminishing what it takes to be a well-educated funeral director.

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Gabriel Schauf
Program Coordinator, MATC Mortuary School Program

Downtown Milwaukee Campus
700 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233-1443

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5555 West Highland Road
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1200 South 71st Street
West Allis, WI 53214-3110

Proposed Changes to Reduce State Funeral Prerequisite Requirements

Current Requirements to Become a Licensed Funeral Director: (445.045 (1))

- ***Person must have completed 2 years of academic instruction***
- ***Person must have completed 9 months of more of mortuary school***
- ***Person must successfully pass a state board examination***
- ***Person must successfully pass a national board examination***
- ***Person must complete one year of apprenticeship***

Proposal: Change 445.045 (1) (d) from “2 academic years of instruction” to “24 semester credits of instruction.”

- ***This change has to do with PREREQUISITE CREDITS ONLY***
- ***Eliminates ELECTIVE Prerequisites and Increases Technical (funeral-related) courses***
- ***Students will still receive an Associate Degree upon successful completion of the program***

Current Model: 61 Prerequisite Credits + 31 Technical (Funeral Service) Credits

Minimum Time Frame: 3.5 years (On a fulltime schedule with summer courses)

Total Credits A Student Takes Currently = 92

Proposed Model: 28 Prerequisite Credits** + 33 Technical (Funeral Service) Credits

Minimum Time Frame: 2 years

Total Credits A Student Will take = 61

**28 Prerequisite Credits is based on MATC's academic schedule and course credits

MATC Funeral Service Program CURRENT MODEL: 92 TOTAL CREDITS

Prerequisites = 61 credits Technical Courses = 31 credits

Minimum Time Frame: 3.5 years

Semester 1

ENG 151 or 201 Communication Skills 1 or English 1 (3 cr)

PSYCH 199 or 231 Psych of Human Relations or Intro to Psychology (3 cr)

SOCSCI 197 or 203 Contemporary Am Society or Intro to Sociology (3 cr)

FUNERL 114 Pathology of Funeral Service (2 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Semester total= 14 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,200

Semester 2

NATSCI 177 Anatomy & Physiology (4 cr)

ENG 152 or SPEECH 201 Communication Skills 2 or Speech (3 cr)

ECON 195 or 201 Economics (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Semester total = 13 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$2,800

Summer

Elective course (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Semester total = 9 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$2,600

Semester 3

NATSCI 197 Microbiology (4 cr)

BADM 165 Legal Environment of Business (3 cr)

ACCTG 110 Financial Accounting (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Semester total = 13 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,200

Semester 4

Elective course (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Elective course (3 cr)

Semester total = 12 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$2,900

Semester 5

FUNERL 110 Intro to Funeral Service (2 cr)

FUNERL 112 Laws, Rules and Regulations of Funeral Serv (3 cr)

FUNERL 116 Funeral Service Practices (4 cr)

FUNERL 131 Embalming Theory (4 cr)

FUNERL 104 Funeral Service Field Experience (2 cr)

Semester total = 15 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,266

Semester 6

FUNERL 117 Funeral Service Management (4 cr)

FUNERL 120 Restorative Art (3 cr)

FUNERL 132 Funeral Service Sciences (4 cr)

FUNERL 153 Psychology of Funeral Service (3 cr)

FUNERL 105 Funeral Service Field Experience (2 cr)

Semester total = 16 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,486

TOTAL: 92 Credits
Estimated \$21,452

MATC Funeral Service Program PROPOSED MODEL: 61 TOTAL CREDITS

Prerequisites = 26 credits Technical Courses = 35 credits

Minimum Time Frame: 2 years

Semester 1

NATSCI 177 Anatomy & Physiology (4 cr)

ENG 151 or 201 Communication Skills 1 or English 1 (3 cr)

PSYCH 199 or 231 Psych of Human Relations or Intro to Psychology (3 cr)

SOCSCI 210 Death & Dying (3 cr)

Semester total = 13 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,200

Semester 2

NATSCI 197 Microbiology (4 cr)

ENG 152 or SPEECH 201 Communication Skills 2 or Speech (3 cr)

ACCTG 110 Financial Accounting (3 cr)

BADM 165 Legal Environment of Business (3 cr)

Semester total = 13 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,200

Semester 3

FUNERL 110 Intro to Funeral Service (2 cr)

FUNERL 112 Laws, Rules and Regulations of Funeral Serv (3 cr)

FUNERL 116 Funeral Service Practices (4 cr)

FUNERL 131 Embalming Theory (4 cr)

FUNERL 114 Pathology of Funeral Service (2 cr)

FUNERL 104 Funeral Service Field Experience (2 cr)

FUNERL XXX National Board Exam Prep Course (1 cr)

Semester total = 18 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,649

Semester 4

FUNERL 117 Funeral Service Management (4 cr)

FUNERL 120 Restorative Art (3 cr)

FUNERL 132 Funeral Service Sciences (4 cr)

FUNERL 153 Psychology of Funeral Service (3 cr)

FUNERL 105 Funeral Service Field Experience (2 cr)

FUNERL XXX National Board Exam Prep Course (1 cr)

Semester total = 17 credits

Tuition / Fees / Textbook Est: \$3,429

**TOTAL: 26 Prerequisite Credits + 35 Technical Credits = 61 Total Credits
Estimated \$13,478**

Total Savings = 1 Year and \$7,974

ABFSE COURSE OUTLINE/GLOSSARY©	Reviewed Date; Approved Date	ABFSE Status As of 5/2019	Next Revision Date 5-7 Year Rotation Subject to Change
Public Health & Technical Content	PHT		
Microbiology	6/2012; 4/2013	<i>Pending Review</i>	2019, 2024, 2030
Human Anatomy	6/2006; 4/2007 5/2014; 4/2015	Current	2020, 2026, 2032
Chemistry	6/2011; 4/2012 7/2017; 4/2018	Current	2023, 2029, 2035
Pathology	6/2006; 4/2007 5/2014; 4/2015	Current	2020, 2025, 2030
Restorative Art	4/2006 5/2013; 4/2014	<i>Pending Review</i>	2019, 2025, 2030
Embalming	4/2001 6/2007; 4/2008 5/2015; 4/2016	Current	2021, 2027, 2033
Business Management Professional Content	BM		
Small Business Management (with Accounting)	6/2004; 4/2005 5/2013; 4/2014 4/2019	Current	2024, 2030, 2036
Funeral Directing	4/2006 5/2009; 4/2011 5/2015; 4/2016	Current	2021, 2027, 2033
Funeral Merchandising	4/2008 6/2011; 4/2012 7/2017; 4/2018	Current	2022, 2028, 2034
Funeral Service Management	4/2002 5/2008; 4/2009 5/2013; 4/2014	<i>Pending Review</i>	2019, 2025, 2031
Federal Trade Commission	6/2001; 4/2002 6/2011; 4/2012	Current	2018, 2023, 2028
Cremation	4/2014 5/2014; 4/2015	<i>Pending review</i>	2019, 2023, 2027
Professional or Business Communications	5/2008; 4/2009 6/2016; 4/2017 4/2019	Current	2021, 2027, 2033
Social Science Content	SS		
Funeral Service Sociology	4/2002 4/2009 6/2014; 4/2015	Current	2020, 2026, 2032
Funeral Service Psychology & Counseling	6/2012; 4/2013 4/2019	Current	2023, 2029, 2035
History of Funeral Service & Embalming	4/2006 6/2014; 4/2015	Current	2020, 2026, 2032
Legal, Regulatory & Ethical Content	LRE		
Business Law	6/2007; 4/2008 6/2011; 4/2012 7/2017; 4/2018	Current	2022, 2028, 2034
Funeral Service Law	4/2007 6/2012; 4/2013 8/2018; 4/2019	Current	2024, 2029, 2034
Ethics (with Funeral Service Oath)	4/2002 5/2008; 4/2009 6/2016; 4/2017	Current	2022, 2028, 2034

***Archival Note:** 2010 No outline reviews took place, the focus was on Global Topics/roundtable discussion format
NOTE: Outline rotation is subject to change pending professional/industry advancements or changes to regulations/policies.

All curriculum outlines are available in .pdf format and can be accessed at <http://www.abfse.org/outlines/>, with a username and password.
©American Board of Funeral Service Education 2018.

November 20, 2019

I am for the reduction of the 29 required elective credits needed to get into the MATC Funeral Service program. Throughout my schooling, I've experienced frustrations with completing the extensive amount of prerequisites. At my old school, there was a very limited amount of elective classes that had the information I could potentially apply to my everyday experiences working in the funeral industry. Due to this, I was forced to take "placeholder" classes such as History of Pop/Rock and Human Sexuality in order to reach this benchmark number. This requirement cost me around \$3958.50 ($\$136.50/\text{credit} * 29 \text{ credits}$, plus fees), and of that total, the amounts below are the "placeholder" classes:

Intro to Modern Cinema-3 credits, \$574.86
Elementary Algebra-3 credits, estimated \$409.50
Human Sexuality-3 credits, \$589.85
History of Pop/Rock-3 credits, estimated \$409.50
Astronomy: The Solar System- 4 credits, estimated \$546.00

This adds up to a big expense for a college student to pay on top of normal living expenses. Due to this financial burden, I was required to cut back to a part-time student to pick up a second job, which put off my schooling and at one point, I almost switched my transfer to a different Funeral Service program. This 29 credit requirement sets students up for frustrations and creates a work load that seems too steep to only achieve an Associates Degree. Please consider lowering this requirement as it opens the doors for a student who may be in the same financial position I am in, without having to take on second jobs and thousands in student loans.

Thank you,

Alex Shadof
402 E Lakeview Ave
Madison WI 53716-1718

November 20, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

I started my funeral director journey in 2010. I was told that even though I am a time served electrical and electronics engineer, I still needed to do all of the prerequisite classes. I asked about an allowance for mature students and was met with silence. She had no idea what I was talking about until I rephrased it to "old people". I finally got an answer as to why I had to do all the elective classes. Apparently, it is to make us "well-rounded". I was 42 years old. I have traveled the world extensively, raised two children and moved to a different continent. I feel these life experiences more than satisfy any "well rounded" requirements.

I ended up taking an online gym class just to get these out of the way. One homework assignment was to do several stretches and report which one I felt the most. We also had to purchase software that would take us through a pregnancy and growth of 2 children until the age of 18. This was a complete waste of my time and money since I had already done this quite successfully in real life.

Funeral service affords an intimate look into real life, serious situations that elective classes cannot possibly come close to preparing us for. The majority of elective classes do not do anything to enhance our funeral director careers, required classes are focused on lessons that we will actually use. Forcing funeral service students to complete around 30 more credits than all the other associate programs is time-consuming and costly. A large portion of students are apprenticing at funeral homes that require working a full 40 hour week as well as being on call every other night and every other weekend. Forcing students to take classes that extend the time that is spent working these very punishing hours while taking classes that have no bearing on our chosen profession is unacceptable.

By reducing the elective requirement by 24 credits, that effectively removes an extra year to the program, it is my opinion that it will bring it in line with all other associate degrees and perhaps encourage more students to consider pursuing a very rewarding career in funeral service.

Thank you,

Emma McMinigal - Funeral Director, MATC Alumni
614 Oak Street
South Milwaukee, WI 53172

November 20, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Joel Jens and I recently graduated from MATC with a degree in Funeral Service. Growing up, my family had three funeral homes and I always knew that I wanted to follow in my father's footsteps and become a funeral director.

Once I graduated high school, I enrolled at my local community college UW-Manitowoc. Here, I began taking the prerequisite classes for the funeral program. Some of the classes I needed such as Microbiology required that I have prerequisite of both an intro to biology and chemistry. So, before I could enroll in prerequisites for my funeral degree, I needed to accomplish these other prerequisites. These classes ended up counting for some of my electives for my degree and they were beneficial.

However, some other classes I had to take were not as useful to my career as a mortician. Since I was required to have 23 additional credits of electives, I took random courses that interested me, such as History of Rock and Roll and Algebra. MATC has suggested courses that funeral directors should take to fill these elective credits like *Death and Dying*, but the schools I went to did not offer such unique classes like that.

Another struggle I had my first year or so was that I had to take an anatomy and physiology class. However, the class offered at UW Manitowoc was split into two semesters, in fall they offered anatomy and in spring they offered physiology. Unfortunately, I struggled with anatomy and knew that for my funeral service program I needed a B or higher so when there was no possible way for me to finish with a B, I had to fail that class that semester. Since anatomy was only offered in the fall and you needed to complete anatomy before taking physiology in the spring, I had to wait a whole year to retake the class. This was extremely frustrating for me because I knew that it would take me another year before I would have all my prerequisites done to apply to the MATC funeral program and that this would mean I would have to delay working for another full year.

Because of this difficulty with anatomy and physiology, I decided to transfer to Lakeshore Technical College (LTC) so that I could continue towards my degree, rather than stalling for another year. At LTC I was able to complete anatomy and physiology in one semester, instead of two like I had to UW-Manitowoc, and online during the summer. This was beneficial for me as I was able to take a very hard class during the summer where I could give it my undivided attention.

I was doing very well at LTC. I was almost finished with all of my requirements to finally attend MATC in the fall. After my spring semester at LTC, I had two classes left to take

the summer before I could attend MATC. One class was accounting and the other was another elective.

I wanted to finish my classes at LTC, however accounting was not offered at LTC as a summer course. Summer is a busy time for everyone and knowing how I learn best, I knew that I wanted the freedom to complete these last two classes at my own pace online. I looked at UW-Manitowoc class offerings and there was not an accounting class available during the summer semester.

Now after already applying to two schools and filling out the paperwork and paying the fees, I had to apply to another school, this time UW-Green Bay as this school offered the online accounting that I was looking for. That semester, I also enrolled in marketing as I've always been interested in it and I thought this class would be great to help me once I took over my family business. Luckily this class was available for me online as well. Once the summer semester was over, I was finally able to enroll for classes at MATC and last fall I began my classes for the funeral service degree.

Throughout my whole experience of four different schools and finally graduating with an associate degree after four years, I would say there are a lot of stipulations that hold you from getting into the program. I knew after high school exactly what I wanted to do. This degree, which should have taken me at most three years to complete, took an extra year. I mainly attribute that to the extra 23 credits of electives we have to take. Electives, most of which, that are no way related to my career as a mortician. Because of this, I support reducing the required electives needed for a degree in funeral service as a way to enable more students to enter this field and succeed academically.

Thank You for Your Support,

Joel Jens
6936 Tall Oaks Road
Manitowoc WI, 54220



November 20, 2019

Senator Chris Kapenga
Chair, Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations
Wisconsin State Capitol

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Public Benefits, Licensing and State-Federal Relations,

My name is Erin Longmire and I am the Executive Director of the Funeral Service & Cremation Alliance of Wisconsin (FSCA), which is a statewide trade association representing funeral directors and funeral homes throughout the state.

The aging population of the United States is propelling the nation toward a milestone: A historic increase in the number of deaths every year. Deaths are projected to reach more than 3.6 million in 2037, 1 million more than in 2015. As the nation's baby boom cohort ages, the number and percentage of people who die will increase dramatically every year, peaking in 2055 before leveling off gradually.

This increased rate of death will precipitate a need for an increase number of licensed funeral directors. Twenty years ago, there was a waiting list to get into Wisconsin's only mortuary school at the Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC). This year's enrollment is currently at 16. This amount of graduates will not fill the demand of the inevitable increase in deaths.

The typical mortuary school enrollee has also changed. According to the American Board of Funeral Service Education, 83% of mortuary school graduates in 2018 had no family in the industry. This represents a major change in the profession that for decades was dominated by family businesses passed down through generations. This means that students can shop more about where they want to live, work and go to school.

AB 576 will help to correct this. The majority of states require a person to have a two year associates degree prior to receiving their funeral director license. Under current law, Wisconsin requires two years of academic instruction and nine months of mortuary school prior to licensure. This means that students are in school for three plus years before earning their associates degree. This puts our mortuary school at a competitive disadvantage to other programs. Students have to spend a longer time and more money to attend and complete Wisconsin's program, making other state's programs more attainable and affordable. AB 576 will instead require 24 prerequisite credits prior to entering mortuary school. This will allow students to complete their associates degree in two years instead of three, putting them in line with other associate degree programs.

The FSCA values our license. Our organization agreed to support this bill when we were assured of two things. First, individuals who graduate from the program would continue to receive an associates degree and second, no core or technical coursework would be eliminated. When we were assured of both of

those things and told that the core, technical coursework would actually increase, the FSCA was happy to support this initiative.

The Funeral Service & Cremation Alliance of Wisconsin (FSCA) supports this legislation as we understand the future of MATC's mortuary school depends on increased enrollment. Our profession's future depends on more individuals entering funeral service. AB 576 will help to accomplish these goals by increasing access to education, while ensuring the future success of the school.

Thank you for your interest in helping to preserve Wisconsin's only mortuary school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Longmire', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Erin Longmire, FSCA Executive Director



November 20, 2019

Senator Chris Kapenga
Chair, Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform
Wisconsin State Capitol

Dear Esteemed Senators,

I am Luke Densow, COO and owner of Wichmann Funeral Homes in the Greater Appleton Area. I am providing testimony in favor of SB 518, which is looking to amend current funeral director licensure requirements and will modernize some very arbitrary restrictions that stop individuals from entering the funeral service profession.

Wichmann Funeral Homes was founded in 1898 and has grown to become one of the area's largest funeral provider. My funeral home includes six facilities while employing about 50 people, of which, 11 are licensed funeral directors and three are licensed apprentice funeral directors. Personally, I would hire two more funeral directors right now if they were available, but they are not.

I am a third-generation funeral director and funeral home owner, have been working in funeral service for over 15 years and I am the current president of the Funeral Service & Cremation Alliance of Wisconsin. Nationwide, as well as in the state of Wisconsin, Funeral Service is experiencing a crisis of individuals not entering our profession.

During my education at the University of Wisconsin in Oshkosh, I decided funeral service was my calling and this was my next step in life. After considering multiple educational paths, I reached out to four mortuary science schools with my transcripts and my story. MATC was one of those schools but it gave me the longest path to licensure. Being 21 years old, I needed an income and I needed a path to licensure that was efficient and expedited. I elected to pursue my mortuary science degree in Denver, CO due to the flexibility and efficiency that Arapahoe Mortuary Science School provided me. Due to my passion for service in the Fox Valley, I did eventually return to funeral service in the state of Wisconsin but my opportunities for employment outside the state were immense.

Mortuary schools need to remain competitive for every potential student. SB 518 will help our state's only mortuary school stay competitive. The bill will allow the school to streamline its current curriculum, adding to the core coursework that will provide more funeral specific instruction. Equally important, students will still receive an associates degree in mortuary science, but will do so in line with the majority of other mortuary school programs and health-related associates degrees offered by technical colleges. Students will graduate with an increased knowledge of funeral service while still maintaining a level of education congruent to what they are already receiving now.

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In closing, funeral directing is not an easy vocation and we need to reward those students who take the time and expense to go through the process of earning their degree. This law will invest in the future and put funeral service in the best position to meet the needs of the citizens of our state.

Thank you.

Respectively submitted,

Luke Densow
President, Wichmann Fargo Funeral Homes

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Called To Be A Funeral Director': Most Mortuary School Grads Are First In The Family

September 23, 2019

Maria Fonseca found her way to mortuary school the way a lot of people do: Someone died.

"Unfortunately, three years ago, I lost a cousin," she says.

The funeral director who helped her family grieve left an impression. Fonseca didn't know anyone in the funeral industry, and she asked to shadow him. Then she decided to follow in his footsteps.

"I want to be there to support [families] whenever they're going through the worst moment in their life," she says.

Like Fonseca, 83% of mortuary college graduates in 2018 had no family in the industry, according to the American Board of Funeral Service Education. They represent a major change in an industry that for decades was dominated by family businesses passed down through generations.

"Nobody just walks in here by an accident," says Todd Van Beck, an administrator at John A. Gupton College in Nashville, Tenn., where Fonseca is working toward a degree.

"I believe firmly people are called to be a funeral director."

From legacy to calling

Van Beck refers to funeral directing as a "ministry," but it wasn't always that way.

In the years following World War II, a surge of veterans used their GI Bill benefits to go to mortuary school, says Jzyk Ennis, a spokesman for the National Funeral Directors Association. It was a secure profession (there would always be a demand for funeral

services), and it was seen as a respectable white-collar job "because funeral directors wore suits," Ennis notes.

After the vets set up their funeral homes, Ennis says, it became standard for their kids or relatives to start working there and, one day, take over.

"The family name of the business becomes a long-term legacy in the community, and the children and grandchildren have secure futures," he says.

But being a funeral director involves long hours and unpredictable schedules — working weekends, taking phone calls in the middle of the night, missing birthday parties. For some people who inherited the business, the lifestyle wasn't worth it.

"I can't imagine a more cursed life than to be a funeral director and not want to do it," says Van Beck.

Still, many stuck with it. Gupton College President Steven Spann remembers when he started working at the school in the mid-1990s.

He says, "You had a lot of family-owned funeral students — their parents were in the funeral industry — back then. You don't see a lot of that now."

Overcoming stigma

Gupton College is a pretty typical two-year school — with some key differences. Most colleges don't have casket displays or offer courses in embalming. Perhaps what's most striking to a casual visitor is the fact that every student, whether in class or wandering the hallway, is required to wear a suit, just as they will one day on the job.

"For females, it's very hard to find a suit anywhere," says Fonseca. "But I managed to."

Fonseca is passionate about her chosen career. But like her fellow first-generation classmates, she faces challenges that students who grew up in funeral homes don't. Those students have lived the material that's covered in their embalming and funeral directing classes. Newcomers have to race to keep up in the first few months, Fonseca says.

Gupton student Austin York, another newcomer, remembers feeling overwhelmed in his first few months.

"I was a nervous wreck," he says. "I wouldn't spend my time talking to any other students."

First-generation students also often face pushback from their loved ones who don't know what the industry is about. Spann, Gupton's president, says it's not uncommon for parents to resist their child's decision to enroll.

"It amazes me, the ones that come back at 22 and 24 and 25 that said, 'I wanted to do this at 18, and Mom and Dad wouldn't let me' because they think that's morbid."

Van Beck, himself a first-generation funeral director, says his parents were relatively supportive when he told them, at age 5, that he wanted to one day work in a funeral home.

But that wasn't the case with other adults he talked to about it.

"Everybody [thought] something horrible must have happened to me. I went to a funeral, and it was the most beautiful thing I had seen."

Eventually, Van Beck says, even uncomfortable family members warm up to the idea after seeing how passionate Gupton students are about funeral services.

That's what happened with Fonseca. She says her mother "freaked out" when Fonseca first shared her new career plans. But her mom has since come around, although she still doesn't like hearing about the schoolwork.

Fonseca hopes to help change the stigma around the funeral industry. After she graduates, she plans to work in a funeral home, and one day she wants to run her own. Then, she hopes to get her family on board — her siblings, maybe even her own children — and pass on a new family funeral business to the next generation.

Michael D. Sharkey's Statement Before the Wisconsin Legislature Regarding the Funeral Director Licensure Requirements Bill, November 20, 2019

Chairperson and Committee Members, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to appear before you to discuss Senate Bill 518 as it concerns Wisconsin funeral director license requirements.

My name is Michael D. Sharkey. I am an attorney admitted to practice in Wisconsin and I hold a Wisconsin funeral director license. I am also admitted to practice law in Minnesota and have a license to practice mortuary science in Minnesota. I work as an attorney practicing mortuary law and represent funeral directors, funeral homes, crematories, and cemeteries in litigation. I counsel funeral homes and funeral directors in regulatory and administrative matters, and advise them on best practices and industry standards. I also serve as an Expert Witness in mortuary law cases. Prior to this, I worked as a Wisconsin licensed funeral director in Marinette County, Wisconsin where I was born and raised. I appear here before you in my role as General Counsel to the Wisconsin Funeral Directors Association, a position I have been in for more than 8 years.

I have grave concerns regarding the proposed legislation which would seek to effectively reduce the educational requirements for funeral directors here in my home state of Wisconsin. I would note to this body that in Michigan, a state Wisconsin shares a border with, legislation has been proposed and is being debated which is moving funeral service education in the exact opposite direction of the bill before this body. Michigan House Bill No. 4437, proposed on April 9, 2019 is seeking to increase the educational requirements for Michigan licensed funeral directors. While I am not advocating for increasing educational standards at this time, it cannot be said that there is a trend to reduce standards when our neighboring state of Michigan is actively moving toward increased educational standards. I note that our neighbor to the west, Minnesota, has long had the educational requirements that Michigan is now striving for.

Against this backdrop, I would like to explain why modern day funeral service is best served when funeral directors have a strong and broad educational background. I base these observations on my own personal work as a mortuary law attorney here in Wisconsin.

First, the honored craft of embalming- which is both a science and an art- is not becoming less complicated, but rather is becoming more complicated. I attended an embalming Continuing Education presentation a few weeks ago in Hayward, WI put on by the Northern Wisconsin Funeral Directors Association. The presenter- an accomplished embalmer- said "if you are embalming the same way you are now as you were ten years ago, you are doing it wrong." The point was that due to things like the opioid crisis and new cancer and other drug treatment regimens, embalming itself is evolving. A full educational background is necessary for modern Wisconsin funeral directors to keep up with these changes in biochemistry and post mortem human pathology.

Second, we are encountering diseases that prior generations of funeral directors have not encountered. Diseases like MRSA and anti-biotic resistant bacterial strains require that funeral directors have the robust educational background to understand the biology and necessary safety precautions when dealing with these newly evolving pathogens.

Third, the legal environment has become ever more litigious- I ought to know. The Wisconsin funeral director must have a broad educational background in order to understand claims and cases and the knowledge to recognize and appreciate best practices in the modern world of lawsuits. This knowledge base also requires funeral directors to have an understanding of the principles of insurance, risk management, administrative law concepts, and regulatory rules like OSHA. OSHA compliance itself is becoming more and more complicated, and training in both the physical aspects of OSHA compliance and the accounting and record keeping aspect of compliance necessitate a broad and deep education.

Fourth, the workplace itself has become a more complicated environment in which to operate. Issues like sexual harassment and sexual discrimination are now- as they should be- issues that must be addressed in an appropriate manner. This requires training and education. Further, rules like ADA and accommodations for disability require a broad and varied educational foundation in order to legally and ethically manage or operate a funeral business.

Finally, the families that we as funeral directors serve require and deserve a funeral director with a broad and robust education. Gone are the days of the homogenous funeral home- where one funeral firm serves one ethnic or religious community and another funeral firm down the street serves a different ethnic or religious community. Families must be provided with choices, and therefore funeral directors in Wisconsin must have the board and robust educational training to serve people of all faiths, ethnicities, and cultures. Furthermore, the days of the classic “nuclear family” are effectively gone. Families are now much more diverse, and due to major changes in societal norms are often fractured. These present very tough situations for the modern funeral director to navigate. Issues of psychology, grief reactions, and an appreciation for complicated family dynamics require the modern funeral director to wear many hats. Only a solid educational background can prepare funeral directors for the situations they will encounter when meeting with families.

For these many and good reasons, I ask the Legislature to not move forward with the proposed bill. Lowering educational requirements will have the effect of producing funeral directors who are not as well equipped to operate in the modern funeral service environment. The families we serve- the good people of Wisconsin- deserve well educated funeral directors who have the background and training to preserve the dignity of the dead while providing comfort and direction to the living left behind in their time of grief.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael D. Sharkey, Esq.
General Counsel to the WFDA



November 30, 2019

Senator Chris Kapenga
Chair, Assembly Committee on Regulatory Licensing Reform
Wisconsin State Capitol

Dear Esteemed Senators,

I am Mark Krause, president and owner of Krause Funeral Homes and Cremation Service in the Greater Milwaukee Area. I am providing testimony in favor of SB 518, which is looking to amend current funeral director licensure requirements and will modernize some very arbitrary restrictions that stop individuals from entering the funeral service profession.

Krause Funeral Homes was founded in 1933 and has grown to become one of Wisconsin's largest funeral providers. My funeral home includes 5 facilities while employing about 65 people, of which, 20 are licensed funeral directors and 10 are licensed apprentice funeral directors. Personally, I would hire 5 more funeral directors right now if they were available, but they are not.

I have a unique perspective on this issue because of my background. I have been president of 2 large international funeral organizations, a nationally recognized industry lecturer educator, member of the American Board of Funeral Service Education, member of the State's only Mortuary School's Advisory Board and past president of the Funeral Service and Cremation Alliance of Wisconsin.

Nationwide, as well as in the state of Wisconsin, Funeral Service is experiencing a crisis of individuals not entering our profession.

Our profession is experiencing an assortment of issues that are creating challenges for funeral home staffing. The American workforce is experiencing more people retiring from or leaving the workforce than entering it. The

beginning of the Baby-Boomer effect on the death rate, the complexity of contemporary funerals, marketing and preneed funding of funerals have all contributed to greater demands on the time, quantity and quality of today's funeral professional. The job market is only going to become more difficult for funeral homes looking for new directors.

Mortuary schools need to remain competitive for every potential student. SB 518 will help our state's only mortuary school stay competitive. The bill will allow the school to streamline its current curriculum, adding to the core coursework that will provide more funeral specific instruction. Equally important, students will still receive an associates degree in mortuary science, but will do so in line with the majority of other mortuary school programs and health-related associates degrees offered by technical colleges. Students will graduate with an increased knowledge of funeral service while still maintaining a level of education congruent to what they are already receiving now.

In closing, funeral directing is not an easy vocation and time and experience are needed to be effective for the families and the funeral homes. This law will invest in the future and put funeral service in the best position to provide a staff that will excel at meeting the needs of the funeral consumer.

Thank you.

Respectively submitted,



Mark Krause

President, Krause Funeral Homes