

Woman Dead For 33 Days Still Not Buried Due To Cemetery Controversy

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DUNKIRK, Md. (WUSA) -- An emergency hearing was held Wednesday in Calvert County Circuit Court for a cemetery facing foreclosure. The Southern Memorial Gardens in Dunkirk has been banned by the state from proceeding with burials, but one family is refusing to let their loved one be buried anywhere else.

"We are never going to be able to look back and remember how nice of a service we were able to have for our mother," said Jackie Sheckell. "We're going to remember the amount of days that she sat decomposing in the funeral home because of the judge here and the cemetery oversight committee."

When Sheckell's mother passed away on July 8th, she and her brother bought a family estate at the Southern Memorial Gardens Cemetery. But nearly five weeks

later, her body has yet to be buried.

"Our mother has been out of the ground, in a funeral home for 26 days," said Sheckell.

The holdup is a bitter court battle between Dennis Miller, the owner of the cemetery, and the Maryland Cemetery Oversight Board.

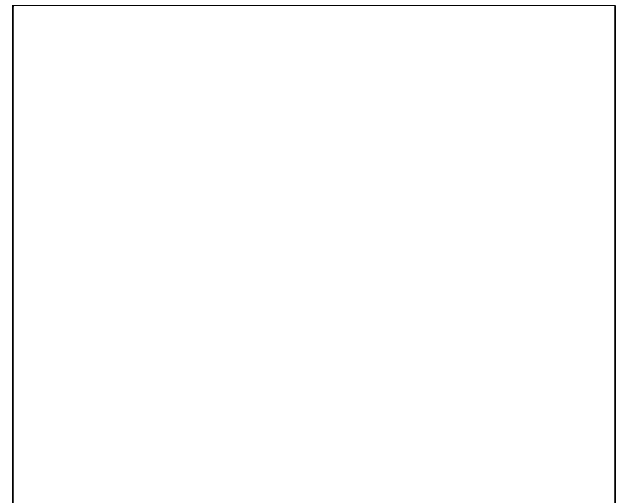
"They're continuing to come after us from every angle. We don't know why they won't let up," said Miller.

The board revoked Miller's license more than a year ago over what he calls a petty paperwork dispute and now his cemetery is in foreclosure. If it goes through, more than 800 people who have pre-paid for plots of land will lose it all.

"What's going to happen if I leave this world today?" said Clara Buckmaster who's owned plots of land in that cemetery since 1970.

Buckmaster was at Wednesday's hearing in which a Prince Frederick County Judge

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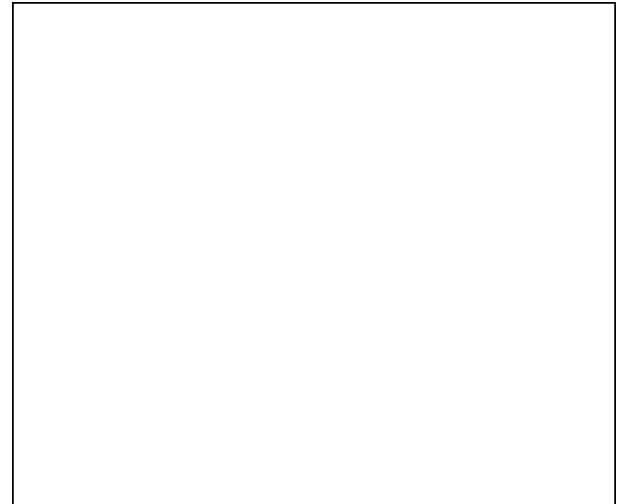
banned Miller from any future burials, including Sheckell's mother.

"I'm furious," said Sheckell.

"I'm disappointed," said Miller. "It's kind of a checkmate position that they've taken against us and I'm not quite sure what's going to happen next."

The Maryland Cemetery Oversight Board declined to comment for this story, citing ongoing litigation. In court, their attorney argued that Miller had continued to conduct burials even after his license had been revoked. Miller is now facing 13 criminal counts for unlicensed burials.

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