

United Cemeteries of Michigan

A Legislative Committee Representing:
Michigan Cemetery Association

Testimony of Michigan Cemetery Association
On HB 6033 and SB 674
December 2, 2008

I am Jay Tower, general counsel for Michigan Memorial Park, Inc. and spokesman for the Michigan Cemetery Association. I have a brief submission for the Committee today, and am available to answer any questions the Members may have.

The Michigan Cemetery Association has worked closely with Speaker Pro Tem Michael G. Sak, Committee Chair Barbara Farah, the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Cemetery Commissioner Steven Gobbo, Senator Jud Gilbert, your colleagues and other leaders to come up with proposals that will protect the financial integrity of the state's cemeteries and restore public trust in an industry that is based on service to families.

The proposed legislation will:

- Tighten control of cemetery trust funds
- Increase accountability
- Ensure that all cemetery owners follow high standards
- Prevent new cemetery owners from accessing trust funds for at least six months
- Improve background checks of new cemetery owners, and
- Toughen penalties against cemetery owners who violate trust fund laws.

The Michigan Cemetery Association encourages the Legislature to swiftly approve these proposals that would safeguard trust fund money, protect Michigan's families and restore confidence in the cemetery owners and operators.

Michigan Cemetery Association members live and work in the communities they serve, many of them dating back generations. They are focused on building trust and serving their customers. The erosion of confidence caused by the pilfering of cemetery trust funds jeopardizes their ability to stay afloat in today's tough economy and threatens local family-owned businesses that create jobs and contribute to the economy.

The money stolen from cemetery trust funds was meant to ensure the future of cemeteries in perpetuity. Tougher standards and closer scrutiny will protect Michigan families, cemeteries and funeral homes alike and will help ensure the successful operation of the state's cemeteries for generations to come.

We ask you to take action now and approve Rep. Michael G. Sak's proposed legislation, as well as the House substitute to SB 674, all of which reflect the hard work and compromise of all the parties noted above, to send a clear message to our citizens and those who would try to take advantage of cemetery trust funds.