

Submission
No 24

INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY

Organisation:

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Telephone:

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Theme:

Summary



Norah McGuire

27th May 2005

The Hon Jan Burnswoods MLC
Chairperson
Social Issues Committee of the Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Burnswoods,

Parliamentary Inquiry into the New South Wales Funeral Industry

For many years I have worked with and for consumers and have listened to their complaints about the Funeral Industry. The cost of a funeral has risen over the years and the perception amongst some consumers is that funeral directors are taking advantage of them at a time when they are in an emotional state and unable, to put it in the words of one older person, 'to think straight'. Not all operators are guilty of this but unfortunately there are a few whose actions encourage this perception.

As a member of the Funeral Industry Council, since 1998, I have worked with the industry representatives and the Funeral & Allied Industries Union to address problems within the industry. It became obvious to me that a registration or licensing scheme was needed so that consumer's complaints could be dealt with by one agency instead of the present fragmentation between different Government Departments. Indeed there have been instances where a consumer has complained to one department, been directed to another and then been sent back the original department.

Another issue is the seeming inability, or lack of will, by various Government Departments to even enforce present regulations and take effective action against operators who provide a substandard service.

An issues paper submitted to the Minister for Health on 16 December was prepared to address the issue of regulation. This paper is being submitted to the committee with a submission from the Funeral Industry Council.

Cost is often a problem for consumers especially during a time of grieving many decisions which need to be made and that can mean that the consumer does not take sufficient time to consider the financial consequences of such decisions.

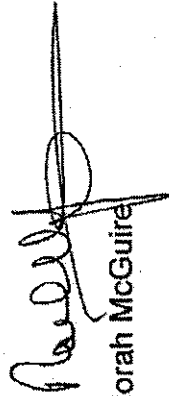
Consumers are often ill informed and don't feel comfortable "shopping around" but funeral directors fees and charges vary and the person making the arrangements can tell one or more directors what kind of funeral they want and ask what it will cost. Each and every service attracts a fee and 'extras' can add a considerable amount to the final cost.

A Code of Practice requiring, amongst other things, that operators provide a clear list of their prices would enable consumers to make an informed choice of services when arranging a funeral. Such a code would also set standards so that consumers would know what to expect in the services provided.

Finally I believe that a Funeral Industry Council with representatives of all stakeholders which is accountable to the Minister can do much to encourage the industry to comply with regulations and reduce costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely


Norah McGuire