

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 777 (Richardson) – As Amended July 9, 2025

Policy Committee: Business and Professions

Vote: 17 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill expedites the existing-law requirement that the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau (Bureau) convene a workgroup to discuss options for ensuring continued care of abandoned cemeteries.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau to convene a workgroup by March 1, 2026, rather than by July 1, 2027, to discuss options for ensuring continued care, maintenance, and embellishment of abandoned cemeteries, including the possibility of requiring counties to assume responsibility for cemeteries located within their boundaries that become abandoned.
- 2) Specifies county responsibilities considered by the workgroup must include maintenance, irrigation, public works, and burial services.
- 3) Revises the list of workgroup participants by deleting “county government and other interested stakeholders” and instead including, but not limited to, the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions, the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties, the Urban Counties of California, the Rural County Representatives of California, public cemeteries, and legislative staff for the appropriate committees of the Legislature.
- 4) Requires the bureau to submit a report to the Legislature summarizing the workgroup’s discussions and recommendations by June 1, 2026, rather than by January 1, 2028.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The Bureau anticipates no additional costs as a result of this bill. The Bureau notes the creation of a workgroup is required by existing law and would not necessitate additional resources.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

This bill is very personal to my constituents and families in my district. Lincoln Memorial Park Cemetery in Carson City that was founded in 1934 has become abandoned by the owner and manager since 2023, due to health care issues. Since then the cemetery has been subject to vandalism, theft and desecration of burial plots. There are

187 private cemeteries in the State of California that are subject to abandonment. However, when cemeteries lose owners, they are without protection. The bureau manages the endowment fund accounts of abandoned cemeteries, and maintains the contracts for burials, but it is not responsible for the care and maintenance of the property itself. As a result, activities necessary for the care of the cemetery grounds often fall to loved ones of those interred or other volunteers, which often have limited capacity and resources to maintain the grounds.

- 2) **Background.** The Bureau, under DCA, administers and enforces the Cemetery and Funeral Act through the licensure and regulation of cemeteries, crematories, funeral establishments, and their personnel. An advisory committee comprised of representatives of both the industry and the public assists the Bureau in engaging consumers and licensees in its regulatory activities.

The Bureau regulates privately owned cemeteries. Public cemeteries, those owned by religious corporations, and cemeteries established prior to 1939 under 10 acres that do not collect endowment care funds are exempt from Bureau oversight. The Bureau also has fiduciary responsibility for more than \$3 billion in funds held and invested by funeral establishments and cemeteries, including endowment care funds and preneed trust funds.

Existing law (AB 3254 (Berman), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2024), requires the Bureau, by July 1, 2027, to convene a workgroup comprised of representatives from the cemetery industry, county government, and other interested stakeholders to discuss options for ensuring continued care, maintenance, and embellishment of abandoned cemeteries, including the possibility of requiring counties to assume responsibility for abandoned cemeteries. Existing law requires the Bureau to submit a report to the Legislature summarizing the workgroup's discussions and its recommendations by January 1, 2028.

As introduced, this bill established a new local process to address the issue of abandoned cemeteries. Recent amendments deleted the bill's contents and instead require the existing workgroup to expedite reporting its recommendations to the Legislature.

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