

CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

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October 9, 2018

Deborah Rappazzo, Director
Office of Cemetery Oversight
500 N. Calvert Street, 3rd Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Ms. Rappazzo,

Thank you for your help answering my questions concerning the records your agency keeps of certain “death care” industry businesses. Under Md. State Gov’t Code Ann. Secs. 4-101 to 4-601, I am writing to request a searchable electronic copy of both the database containing complaints filed at your office and the database of licensees.

According to our conversations and previous correspondence, I understand that the complaints are stored as an Excel spreadsheet file that contains records of complaints filed by members of the public against cemeteries, monument dealers, sellers of burial goods and crematories, both those within and outside your official regulatory oversight. I request a copy of all records stored by your office, which you have previously indicated covers only fiscal years 2013-2017. This request includes but is not limited to the names and locations of organizations against which complaints have been filed, as well as the dates, types, and summary text of the complaints themselves and the result and resolution of the complaints or status of any pending investigations, if available.

I also request the database of all cemeteries, monument dealers, sellers of burial goods, and related companies and businesses licensed by your organization, which you have previously indicated is stored in a Db2 database and referred to internally as the AS-400. I request a copy of all records in the database for the same time period as the complaints records, fiscal years 2013-2017; or if the electronic records do not go back that far, for as long as they have been stored. This request includes but is not limited to the internal registration number, license number, license expiration date, license category, name and address of the licensee. I understand your organization usually provides information from this database exported into Excel spreadsheets; however, I also request a copy of the database itself in its original format, if possible.

In addition to the databases and records, I request electronic copies of any available documentation for them. This would include a record layout, data dictionary, lookup tables or code sheets, and user manual, if applicable, as well as a sample of any forms you use to transfer the information into the database. I also specifically request a key to the license categories, as we discussed previously.

I request the files in the formats specified above. However, if necessary, please note that I can accept Excel files, any standard database format—such as a SQL backup file, Microsoft Access database, delimited file, Db2 file or fixed-length file—or other standard file format that is searchable and analyzable. Please do not provide the files in a PDF format, unless they are unavailable in any other form. I would prefer to receive the file as an email attachment, a download from a file server or on a flash drive, CDROM or DVD disc mailed to the address at the end of this letter.

If you regard any of the requested records as subject to exemption from disclosure at your discretion, I request that you exercise that discretion and disclose them nonetheless.

Specifically, you have previously mentioned that licensee or organization names may be redacted in copies produced of the licensee database or complaints records. However, as names of licensed organizations are readily available by cross-referencing addresses with other public information, as well as directly through the Registration Search function on the Office of Cemetery Oversight website itself, I request you reconsider redacting this information from records you provide in answer to this request.

If you find that any exemptions do apply, please be aware of the specific requirements under Section 4-203(c)(3) that you provide any part of the records that are reasonably severable. If you choose to redact any records, I request that you provide a list of redacted fields.

If you deny any portion of this request, please provide the specific legal authority for the denial as specified under the law Section 4-203(c)(2)(ii).

I am making this request as a reporter for Capital News Service, a non-profit news organization with offices in College Park, Washington, D.C. and Annapolis that covers public affairs news for an audience of people in Maryland. The records disclosed pursuant to this request will be used in the preparation of news articles for dissemination to the public.

Accordingly, I request that, pursuant to 4-206(e), you waive all fees in the public interest, because the furnishing of the information sought by this request will primarily benefit the public and is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of government. If, however, you decline to waive all fees, I request that you notify me of these fees before complying with any portion of this request for which there will be a charge.

If you have any questions or need any further information from me, please contact me at the email address, mailing address or phone number below.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,



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Capital News Service

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