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Legislation Proposed to Bury Prohibition of Joint Ownership of Funeral Home and Cemetery

Wisconsin is one of just four states that prevent joint funeral and cemetery operations.

(MADISON) – A little-known Wisconsin law prohibiting the joint ownership of funeral homes and cemeteries may be headed to the graveyard if newly proposed legislation is approved in Madison.

The bill, currently being circulated for co-sponsorship by State Representative Evan Wynn (R-Whitewater), repeals Wisconsin's so called "anti-combo" law – which is one of just four such laws still on the books around the nation. Wynn's proposal has the strong support of Wisconsin's cemetery owners, which have formed a new organization, the Wisconsin Organization for Responsible Consumerism (WORC), to support the bill.

"This antiquated prohibition limits consumer choice and is a barrier to cost savings for families dealing with the death of a loved one," said Christine Toson Hentges, vice president, Tribute Cemetery Systems in Hartland. "It's time Wisconsinites have the same options that nearly every other state does when it comes to making the arrangements for memorial and burial services."

"This regulation makes as much sense as passing a law to force fans at Lambeau Field to buy their brat at one stand and their beer at another," said Glen Porter, president, Highland Memorial Park in New Berlin. "Cemetery owners in Wisconsin believe healthy competition will improve customer service and lead to lower prices. We hope the Legislature will quickly take up this bill and pass it into law."

The Federal Trade Commission said in comments submitted to the Wisconsin State Assembly that "permitting joint ownership or operation (of cemeteries and funeral homes) could make possible new business formats and improvements in efficiency and could encourage entry of new competitors, which could in turn lead to lower prices and improved service to consumer."

Some specific benefits of repealing the prohibition on joint-ownership as outlined by cemetery owners include:

- o Providing consumers with the ability and convenience to make all funeral and cemetery arrangements at one time, dealing with one person.
- Placing accountability on one arranging organization, thereby serving the needs of the grieving family much more efficiently.
- Creating greater efficiencies and lower prices for consumers by increasing competition and eliminating duplicative administrative costs.
- Eliminating the need to move the elderly and infirm from location to location to pay final respects to deceased loved ones - which provides comfort and lessens stress.