



From The NC Board of Funeral Service.....

As the Coronavirus continues to spread across the United States, it has direct and immediate impact on North Carolina. With regard to the practice of funeral service, the NC Board of Funeral Service will send you regular updates on the crisis as more information is announced at both the state and federal levels.

As an important first step, please visit the Board website at www.ncbfs.org for links to current, critical sources of information regarding the virus and its impact on our state and profession.

UPDATE TO LICENSEES: Governor Cooper's Press Conference

March 17, 2020

Governor Roy A. Cooper held a press conference this afternoon at 2:00 p.m. to announce the closure of all bars and restaurants throughout North Carolina except for take-out and delivery service. He also reported several changes in the state's laws pertaining to unemployment insurance to assist those individuals who will become unemployed or have their hours reduced as a result of the closures. The Governor was accompanied by Dr. Mandy Cohen, Secretary, NC Department of Health and Human Services, and Erik A. Hooks, Secretary, NC Department of Public Safety. In the question and answer session following the Governor's comments, he affirmed that Executive Order 117 restricts public gatherings to no more than 100 individuals at the same location. ***He has not changed the number of individuals who may attend a public gathering at one time; the number will remain at 100 until further notice.***

The Board has received numerous calls concerning this restriction. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the NC Department of Health and Human Services are ***recommending*** that no more than 50 individuals gather at the same location; however, this recommendation is not binding. You may also be aware that the White House is recommending that public gatherings be limited to no more than 10 individuals. Again, this recommendation is a guideline and not binding at this time.

As noted in the email you received earlier today, funeral services and related events are included in the Governor's restrictions on public gatherings of no more than 100 individuals at the same location. In his press conference today, Governor Cooper stated that he hoped there would be voluntary compliance with his directive by all covered organizations. He noted the restriction's difficulty on individuals and communities across the state, but said that, if necessary, local law enforcement would cite organizations that do not comply with the Executive Order.

As a funeral service provider, you should read the Executive Order and decide how you will comply with its requirements. If necessary, please consult legal counsel for guidance on your compliance. The Board cannot instruct you on how you must comply. In at least one area of the state, local funeral home managers met and agreed to release a joint public statement saying that they would only offer private funeral services, private graveside services, and private visitations until further notice. There are likely other examples across the state as funeral service licensees work with families they serve to address this restriction on public gatherings while still making every effort to accommodate a family's wishes.

In other developments, Board President Mark Blake met with Dr. Michelle Aurelius, Chief Medical Examiner, in a conference call this afternoon with the NCBFS Executive Director, NCBFS Assistant Director, and OCME General Counsel. They discussed a number of issues pertaining to the Medical Examiner's jurisdiction over cases where the cause of death is known to have been the result of COVID-19. The Chief Medical Examiner stated that unless the cause of death is unknown, unattended, or violent, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner does not have jurisdiction in those cases since a diagnosis existed prior to death.

Dr. Aurelius said that the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is not currently admitting non-essential visitors to the OCME facility. *If funeral home employees come to the facility for a removal, they must call in advance for an appointment.* Upon arrival, they will be screened including a temperature check. If screening does not indicate any illness or symptoms of illness, those doing the removal will be admitted.

Other news that we want to share with you

Executive Director Davis spoke yesterday with Christine Mullarkey-Campbell, the Mass Fatality Manager/Emergency Management Planner in the NC Department of Health and Human Services/Division of Public Health. Ms. Mullarkey-Campbell reached out to Davis to offer support and assistance in communications to funeral service professionals in North Carolina regarding COVID-19 and its impact.

The Board will continue to discuss these critical issues concerning the impact of the virus on funeral service and will keep you informed on developments that potentially affect your operations and capacity for serving families. We have available a range of state resources and encourage you to visit our website for important links to these state organizations as well as the NFDA and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is essential that we all work collaboratively in confronting the challenges we face as the Coronavirus continues to expand rapidly across the United States. Current news reports indicate a continued increase over the next several weeks with additional confirmed cases and a subsequent rise in the number of virus-related deaths.

Reminder

The Board office suite in Raleigh, NC, is currently closed to the public. If you are planning to hand-deliver items that are time-sensitive, please be reminded that you may drop off your materials by placing them in the drop-box we have provided outside the office. We date-stamp all items received daily to assure confirmation of receipt.