

An Advisory To Licenseesfrom 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.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION & UPDATES FOR LICENSEES

Governor Eases Stay-at-Home Restrictions; Phase II "Safer At Home" Begins

As most are aware, Governor Cooper announced yesterday that North Carolina will move into Phase 2 restrictions on Friday, May 22, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. After two weeks in Phase 1, the state's overall key indicators remain stable, but the continued increases in daily case counts signal a need to take a more modest step forward in Phase 2 than originally envisioned.

With the implementation of Executive Order 141, the Governor lifted the Stay-at-Home restrictions that he imposed on March 27, 2020, through Executive Order 121 and replaced them with Safer-at-Home provisions. We have included Executive Order 141 in our listing of *Important Information and Communications* so that you can read the full text of the Order and seek guidance from your legal counsel if necessary.

In Section 4 of Executive Order 141, Governor Cooper specifically exempts funeral ceremonies from its provisions. We have provided the following extraction from the Order that cites this exemption:

Section 4. Exemptions from This Executive Order. Worship, religious, and spiritual gatherings, funeral ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, and other activities constituting the exercise of First Amendment rights are exempt from all the requirements of this Executive Order and Executive Order Nos. 121 and 138, notwithstanding any other provision of this Executive Order or of Executive Order Nos. 121 and 138. The undersigned strongly urges that entities and individuals engaging in these exempted activities follow the Recommendations to Promote Social Distancing and Reduce Transmission, avoid exceeding Emergency Maximum Occupancy in the places where they meet, and avoid holding Mass Gatherings.

We are also sharing with you an extraction from *Frequently Asked Questions* about Phase II restrictions with regard to weddings and funerals:

Are weddings and funerals allowed to be held in Phase 2?

Yes. Even though there is no mass gathering cap on the people who may attend a wedding or funeral ceremony, receptions or visitations before or after weddings and funerals are subject to the mass gathering limit. Individuals are encouraged to follow the Three Ws to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19.

Please note the encouragement to continue social distancing and any steps you can take to minimize the risk of virus transmission and infection to those visiting a funeral establishment for arrangements conferences, services, visitations, receptions, or preneed meetings. The Three W's announced in the Phase I restrictions are Wait. Wash. Wear. For more information, please visit the North Carolina COVID-19 Response website at <https://www.nc.gov/covid19>.

The Phase II restrictions will remain in effect through 5:00 p.m. on Friday, June 26, 2020, unless otherwise amended.

Please consult your attorney or legal counsel for guidance on the interpretation and application of these provisions if you have questions.

NCBFS Operations and Hours

Board staff are currently working on a staggered basis with work schedules alternating between 3 days on site in the office and 2 days teleworking. The Board office is open to visitors, but we are strictly observing social distancing and hand sanitation for both staff and visitors. Compliance Inspectors have resumed their on-site visits to licensed establishments but are minimizing travel that would require hotel accommodations to every extent practical.

This week, the Board has experienced significant and persistent outages of our telephone system, and AT&T has been working this week to identify, isolate and repair apparent problems with our telephone cable and lines. We appreciate your patience and hope that we soon have full restoration of our phone service. Until then, please rely upon email as a primary means of communication with Board staff.

Continuing Education Requirements

We have heard from several licensees concerns regarding continuing education requirements and the availability of sufficient classroom instruction to help meet the annual 5-hour requirement for license renewal. The Board is closely monitoring whether or not to waive any requirements for continuing education expressed in our administrative rules particularly the limit on online instruction. The Board will continue to assess whether or not any waiver of administrative rules for continuing education will be necessary.

The Board will announce soon a schedule for Board-sponsored training on preneed, cremations and other topics that are critical to the practice of funeral service. In 2019, the Board sponsored 20-hours of instruction for CE credit in locations across North Carolina.
