



Monroe County Legislature

VINCENT R. FELDER
DEMOCRATIC MINORITY LEADER

ERNEST FLAGLER-MITCHELL
BLACK & ASIAN CAUCUS LEADER

February 8, 2021

To The Honorable
Monroe County Legislature
39 West Main Street
Rochester, New York 14614

RE: Dignified Indigent Burial Act

Honorable Legislators:

As part of its Temporary Assistance program, Monroe County offers grants to assist individuals and families to afford the cost of funeral expenses for a loved one who has passed away. For applicants determined to be eligible for Temporary Assistance, Monroe County will currently provide a funeral assistance grant up to a maximum of \$1,250 for decedents aged six years or older, or up to \$500 for deceased children aged five years or younger. However, for a funeral to be eligible for assistance, the total funeral cost cannot amount to more than \$6,000. If the funeral costs more than \$6,000, Monroe County will not provide financial assistance, as it does not consider it an indigent burial.

Prior to 2006, Monroe County offered grants up to \$1,850 for funeral costs. That year, the grant was cut to \$1,250 despite strong objections from clergy and advocates. Decreased funeral costs did not drive this change. In fact, the National Funeral Directors Association (NDFA) states that the median funeral cost increased by 28.6-percent from 2004 to 2014, and another 6.4-percent from 2014 to 2019. The NDFA reported that the median cost for a funeral was \$7,640 in 2019, not including a vault; add a vault, and the total cost increases to \$9,135.

In talking with families and funeral home directors, it is clear that \$1,250 is simply not enough for a dignified burial. The County Administration will tell this Honorable Body that most grant recipients do not use the full \$1,250 allotment, but that is because families are often forced into choosing cremation as a lower cost option even when it conflicts with religious beliefs.

All residents of our community, regardless of income, deserve a dignified burial process. People should also have the option to be buried close to family to make it easier for loved ones to pay their respects. It is clear that we need to increase the Supplemental Funeral Assistance Grant better to reflect the actual costs of burials in our community. In talking with funeral directors and gathering cost estimates for different cemeteries and options, it is recommended that the grant be increased to \$2,000 for decedents aged six years or older and \$800 for deceased children aged five years or younger.

The specific legislative action required is to increase the Supplemental Funeral Assistance Grant's maximum allocation in an amount not to exceed \$2,000 for decedents aged six years or older, and \$800 for deceased children aged five years or younger.

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No.	<u>210042</u>
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Committee Assignment	
HUMAN SERVICES	-L
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This action is a Type II Action pursuant to 6 NYCRR 617.5(c) (26) ("routine of continuing agency administration and management, not including new programs or major reordering of priorities that may affect the environment") and is not subject to further review under the State Environmental Quality Review Act.

Funding for this grant increase is included in the 2021 operating budget of the Department of Human Services, general fund 9001, funds center 5111010000, Family Assistance and 5110010000, Safety Net Assistance. No additional net county support is required in the current Monroe County budget.

I recommend this matter be referred to the appropriate committee(s) for favorable action by this Honorable Body.

Respectfully Submitted,



Vincent R. Felder
Democratic Minority Leader



Ernest Flagler-Mitchell
Black & Asian Caucus Leader