



Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hetherington and members of the Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections. My name is Derek Buckley and I am the Town Clerk for the Town of Easton. I am writing to you today in support of Committee Bill #14 that pertains to Abandoned Cemeteries.

Abandoned cemeteries are a problem for many municipalities because they are not maintained and attract vandalism. Because title is not clear, they are open to abuse with overnight drinking parties, ghost hunters, souvenir hunters, and removal or destruction of gravestones. Many of these sites are pre-revolutionary war, or civil war, and contain historically significant burials. A significant part of the historic heritage is in an advanced state of deterioration. Action is required before it is lost forever. In many small communities, the cost of restoration is prohibitive. At the same time, private or federal funding is not available because the municipality does not own the cemetery.

It would be helpful if the proposed legislation included the following features:

1. **Acquisition of an Abandoned Cemetery including gravesites and lots.**
The owner of an abandoned cemetery usually does not own the occupied graves, or empty lots. This creates a complex ownership situation in old cemeteries making it difficult to trace title. Acquiring ownership of the cemetery is not enough. The municipality must own the cemetery, and the occupied gravesites and unoccupied lots in order to restore the cemetery and the graves.
2. **Acquiring Ownership.** It would be helpful if a municipality could acquire title by providing legal notice that it intended to acquire an abandoned cemetery, and all of the graves and lots, if the owner does not assert title. This puts the onus on owners to claim ownership.
3. **Town Sexton for Abandoned Cemeteries.** Once acquired the municipality needs to manage, maintain and restore the cemetery. To do this the executive body of the municipality should be permitted to appoint a Town Sexton for abandoned cemeteries and appropriate funds to support that office, subject to the normal budget process. This would resolve the uncertainty about whether the current statutes permit such action.
4. **Assertion of ownership.** Individuals and organizations should be able to reassert ownership if they can prove title.
5. **Family Graves.** If the cemetery deed was not recorded and cannot be located, then after a due diligence effort to find the owners, the municipality should be able to assume title. The municipality would then be able to authorize future burials of family members in family graves.

I know that you have many items on your agenda this session. I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on this bill and am willing to work with all interested parties to revise the language. Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. I have submitted similar testimony on Bill #547 that deals with a similar topic.