

Thomas F. Morrissey HB 5557

March 17,

2014

To: State Senator Terry B. Gerratana and State Representative Susan Johnson  
Co-Chair Public Health Committee, State of Connecticut  
Legislative Office Building, 400 Capital Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

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I want to thank you both for engaging the Public Health Committee in addressing a means for essential financial support of the "Care of Neglected Cemeteries" referred to in Connecticut Statue 19a-308. I am in Florida until the end of March and apologize for not being able to attend this important hearing.

I am a retired New Haven detective with twenty-seven years of service plus two years in the Military Police. Half of my career I served as NHPD's Community Youth Coordinator. I was also a proud member of the Boards of Directors of the Archdiocese of Hartford Office of Urban Affairs, Yale University's Ulysses S. Grant Foundation, YMCA Greater New Haven, Community Action Agency, New Haven Emergency Fuel Bank, Big Brother/Big Sister and chaired Connecticut Special Olympics Good Life Auction for three consecutive years.

Some years ago a wonderful young man I knew from childhood through the Community Youth Program was killed by a stray bullet in New Haven. His loving family had limited funds. He was buried in the State Street Cemetery in Hamden. I willingly offered to pay for his headstone.

I had not visited the cemetery in a few years when last August I stopped by to pay my respect. I was shocked by the disgraceful and dangerous condition that exist. Any sense of dignity depleted by decay and neglect. The headstone of my friend covered in over growth of bushes, weeds and briars. One could easily pass the cemetery without recognizing its significance. The sign itself gone. There were several indications of bonfires with broken beer and wine bottles scattered about the sacred grounds.

I called a number of funeral homes and relative agencies to determine the responsible party without positive results. It became clear that whomever was once accountable had disappeared and no funds were now available to care for the upkeep of the State Street Cemetery.

I then contacted my State Representative Mary Fritz. Representative Fritz took the time to research the issue and in doing so determined that this is a State wide concern requiring legislative action. I was encouraged to advise Speaker Brendan Sharkey of the problem in letter form as he represents Hamden. Speaker Sharkey called to say that a meeting of his staff had been convened to further explore the matter. He hoped the next legislative session would work together in finding a fair means of resolve.

Needless to say, those of us involved in the improvement of conditions for others too often are met with resistance that's impossible to overcome thus the negative status remains the same.

The active involvement of Speaker Sharkey, Representative Fritz, and the Public Health Committee is most reassuring. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance to you and your Committee.

Again, thank you.