



•P.O. Box 395 • Hanover, VA 23069 •
Phone: (804) 264-0505 • Fax: (804) 264-3260

March 23, 2020

TO: The Honorable Ralph S. Northam, Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia
The Honorable Daniel Carey, Secretary of Health and Human Resources
M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA, Virginia Health Commissioner
Jeffrey D. Stern, State Coordinator Emergency Management
Parham Jaber, MD, MPH, Deputy Commissioner, Public Health and Preparedness
Local Virginia Health Department Directors
Corie E. Tillman Wolf, J.D., Executive Director, Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers
Christine Martine, Executive Director, Virginia Cemetery Board

Re: Inclusion of Deathcare Professionals in All COVID-19 Orders

On Behalf of Our Members,

Insomuch as many Health Departments, State and other local agencies are issuing various orders ranging from size restrictions of public gatherings to shelter-in-place orders, the Virginia Funeral Directors Association (VFDA) is requesting that all orders include deathcare professionals.

Currently, most orders are identifying that only essential activities and businesses are to be open. Included in these orders are health care operations as well as other businesses related to general health and essential infrastructure. The VFDA believes all deathcare professionals including funeral homes, crematories, cemeteries and suppliers to these businesses are related and essential infrastructure. We encourage any new orders to specifically identify the deathcare professions as an essential business and function to avoid any confusion.

Importantly, federal guidance has already listed deathcare workers as "critical infrastructure workers." On March 19, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) named mortuary workers as "critical infrastructure workers." This underscores the vital role funeral directors and others who work in deathcare play in responding to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

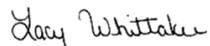
This guidance defines mortuary workers as "Workers performing mortuary services, including funeral homes, crematoriums, and cemetery workers." Additionally, the guidance states that "Workers who coordinate with other organizations to ensure the proper recovery, handling, identification, transportation, tracking, storage, and disposal of human remains and personal effects; certify cause of death; and facilitate access to mental/behavioral health services to the family members, responders, and survivors of an incident," are included in the "Healthcare/Public Health" category along with doctors, nurses, people performing testing, and researchers. This essentially and appropriately covers the full spectrum of those who work in deathcare.

The Virginia Funeral Directors Association requests this guidance language be used in any forthcoming orders related to the current COVID-19 pandemic and in future circumstances in which deathcare workers would be critical infrastructure workers. This guidance clearly defines for state and local public health officials the professions that are essential to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

The guidance specifically notes that critical infrastructure workers should have priority access to personal protective equipment and be exempt from “shelter-in-place” mandates. While the guidance does not address priority access for a COVID-19 vaccine once it is developed, this guidance does signal that critical infrastructure workers would take precedence.

If you have any questions, please contact us at (804) 264-0505.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lacy Whittaker".

Lacy S. Whittaker
Executive Director
Virginia Funeral Directors Association

cc: Jerry Andrews, Andrews Funeral Home, VFDA President