December 14, 2020

Honorable Ralph S. Northam

Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

Post Office Box 1475

Richmond, Virginia 23218

**Re: Declare Funeral Professionals as Essential Workers in Virginia**

Dear Governor Northam:

The global pandemic we have experienced this year has been unprecedented and unrelenting in its impact on our communities and businesses here in Virginia. I appreciate the critical steps our Commonwealth has taken at your directive to limit the spread of COVID-19; mitigate the impact of illness, suffering and death; and sustain critical infrastructure and key resources. I am grateful for all you have done to keep my colleagues and me safe as we have continued to carry out our duties on the front lines of this pandemic as funeral professionals.

However, I am writing today to ask you to go one step further and **formally acknowledge funeral professionals as essential healthcare workers in Virginia.**

When a patient enters a hospital, they trust their well-being to healthcare professionals who are designated as essential workers, supplied with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and classified in top-tiers to receive federal and state support and access to vaccines as they become available.

Regardless of the care they receive, that same patient has two options for leaving the hospital–the front door and the back door. My deathcare colleagues and I are the ones waiting at the back door.

We provide essential services to the deceased and their families. Yet, we are not formally recognized as essential healthcare workers despite our high-risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus and the critical services we provide to grieving families in our communities.

As deathcare professionals, we face the same risk of exposure to COVID-19 as healthcare workers when we enter hospitals, nursing homes, and residences to take the body of a decedent into our care. We meet with surviving family members who may have been exposed to the coronavirus. And we prepare the bodies of pandemic victims for burial or cremation.

If we do not have the resources and support necessary to maintain our post to care for the deceased, hospitals and healthcare facilities that are already overwhelmed face the even greater challenges of communicating with surviving loved ones, properly cataloging and storing remains, and allocating resources to temporary morgues and transfer agencies.

We have gone to extraordinary lengths this year to help grieving families honor their loved ones and find closure through traditional funeral services and funeral rites. However, we have faced obstacles at every turn in order to provide these vital services to the communities of Virginia. Our obstacles have included dangerous shortages of PPE, delays in acquiring necessary state-mandated paperwork, and limiting the funeral services we perform to only those who practice religious beliefs to follow executive orders. These obstacles would significantly decrease if we were recognized by your office as essential healthcare workers, which would allow us to turn our full attention to the families we serve as they grieve the loss of loved ones.

As you continue to make critical decisions about COVID-19 for the citizens of Virginia, **I ask you to formally acknowledge funeral professionals as essential healthcare workers.**

On behalf of the Virginia Funeral Directors Association and my own firm [insert business name], I thank you for your leadership and stand ready, as always, to care for the dead and the families they leave behind.

Sincerely,

Name

Funeral Establishment