

Position on Licensure, Standards and Certification

Written for the National Home Funeral Alliance

By Lee Webster

Definitions

Licensure

Licensure of the funeral profession is granted by State Funeral Boards at the successful completion of a mandatory accredited educational component, standard period of internship or apprenticeship, and one more standardized examination. Activities, including responsibility for physical care of dead bodies and funeral planning, are regulated by the authorizing governing body. Licensure grants permission to practice the profession. The NHFA agrees that home funeral guides are not eligible for licensure without completing the state requirements for funeral professionals.

Certification and Certificates of Completion

Certification as a general term is an acknowledgement by a certifying body that an individual has voluntarily and successfully completed a program that has identifiable standards or content set by a formal certifying body.

In contrast, training programs that award *certificates of completion* do so on their own merit. What gives certificates of completion authority is the integrity and credibility of the program educator(s). Certificates of completion carry no legal weight, nor do they prove competency. Certificates of completion are granted by the program and pertain only to that program.

Statement

The National Home Funeral Alliance acknowledges the value of certificates of completion awarded by home funeral education providers for the purpose of ensuring that home funeral guides and the public receive appropriate and consistent information to aid them in carrying out a home funeral or teaching others how to do so. However, the NHFA neither grants certification, nor acts in any regulatory fashion to restrict or empower certificate of completion program providers. The NHFA does not support mandatory requirements for either licensure or certification.

Standards

The NHFA does not set standards for certificate of completion awarding program providers.

Rationale

The NHFA's position regarding potential required home funeral guide licensure and certification is based on the following observations:

- Requiring licensure or certification would force guides into becoming industry professionals, which is in direct opposition to what home funeral guides stand for, specifically keeping the care of the deceased in the hands of the family and not in the realm of industry professionals.

- Guides view themselves differently in different parts of the country according to their beliefs, and as their work (such as hospice) informs their vocation. Guides do not provide a uniform type of service, making it impossible for the State(s) to regulate. In addition, regulating standards would create a hardship for families whose inherent right it is to care for their own dead without being required to pay an outsider/professional.
- By requiring home funeral guides to pay to obtain licensure or certification, individuals would be compelled to pay for courses, exam fees, etc., potentially placing them under financial duress, which could force them into charging fees when many offer their services for free as a public service.
- Most importantly, licensure and mandatory certification could each have the ripple effect of curtailing families' rights by implying that someone with credentials is required to be involved in order to have a home funeral, a concept that would undoubtedly meet with resistance by any American concerned with keeping their legal rights intact.

Resources

University of Michigan School of Public Health article on Certificate vs. Certification

http://sph.umich.edu/distance/certificate_vs_certification.html

Defining Our Roles, PowerPoint Presentation PDF by Lee Webster, Finding Our Voice NHFA conference, Chicago, 2011