

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2017 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 3071

BY DELEGATE SUMMERS

[Introduced March 14, 2017; Referred
to the Committee on Finance.]

A BILL to amend and reenact §9-5-9 and §9-5-18 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, all relating to indigent burial; providing for liability of spouses or relatives for certain expenses of an indigent person; eliminating liability of certain persons for support of an indigent person; defining terms; limiting liability of certain persons for funeral expenses of an indigent person; authorizing department to require certain financial information; requiring certain sworn statements regarding ability to pay for funeral services for an indigent person; limiting the total number of indigent funeral services that may be paid for by the Department of Health and Human Resources per year; and requiring cremation under certain circumstances.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

That §9-5-9 and §9-5-18 of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended and reenacted, all to read as follows:

ARTICLE 5. MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS.

§9-5-9. Liability of relatives for support.

(a) The relatives of an indigent person, who are of sufficient ability, shall be liable to support such person in the manner required by the Department of welfare and to pay for the expenses of burial when he dies any funeral services provided for the indigent person and paid for by the department, in the following order:

(1) The spouse.

~~(4)~~ (2) The children.

~~(2)~~ (3) The father.

~~(3)~~ (4) The brothers and sisters.

~~(4)~~ (5) The mother.

(b) The ~~commissioner~~ department may proceed by motion in the circuit court of the county in which the indigent person may be, against one or more of the relatives liable.

(c) If a relative so liable does not reside in this state and has no estate or debts due him

13 or her within the state by means of which the liability can be enforced against him or her, the other
14 relatives shall be liable as provided by this section, ~~but a relative shall not be compelled to receive~~
15 ~~the indigent person in his own home.~~

16 ~~If it appears that a relative liable for the support funeral expenses of an indigent person is~~
17 ~~unable wholly to support him, but is able to contribute toward his support, the court may assess~~
18 ~~upon the relative the proportion which he shall be required to contribute either to the past expense~~
19 ~~incurred by the Department of welfare or to the future support. The court may assess the residue~~
20 ~~upon the relatives in the order of their liability.~~

21 ~~Payment with interest and costs may be enforced by execution.~~

22 (d) The liability of the relative of an indigent person for funeral service expenses created
23 by this section is limited to the amount paid by the department pursuant to the provisions of section
24 eighteen of this article.

25 (e) For purposes of this section, "spouse" means the person to whom the decedent was
26 legally married or not legally separated at the time of the decedent's death and who survived the
27 decedent.

**§9-5-18. Funeral service expenses for indigent persons; filing of affidavit and other
financial information to certify indigency; penalties for false swearing; payment by
~~division~~ department.**

1 (a) The Department of Health and Human Resources ~~shall~~ may pay for reasonable funeral
2 service expenses for indigent persons who are cremated ~~and \$1,250 for those who are~~ or buried
3 in an amount not to exceed \$1,250.

4 ~~(b) For purposes of this section~~ Prior to paying for funeral services, the department shall
5 determine the indigency of a deceased person, ~~is determined by the filing of~~ and whether or not
6 the deceased's estate or any of family member who is liable for the funeral service expenses
7 pursuant to section nine of this article is financially able to pay, alone or in conjunction, for the
8 funeral service expenses. The department shall require that an affidavit be filed with the

9 department, in a form provided by and determined in accordance with the income guidelines as
10 set forth by the department, as well as any other supporting financial information the department
11 may require, including, but not limited to, bank statements and income tax information of the
12 deceased person and the relatives of the deceased person who are liable for the funeral service
13 expenses pursuant to section nine of this article. The affidavit must be: (1) Signed by the ~~heir or~~
14 ~~heirs-at-law which states~~ relatives liable for the funeral service expenses and state that the estate
15 of the deceased person is pecuniarily unable to pay the ~~costs associated with a funeral,~~ funeral
16 service expenses and that the sole or combined assets of the relatives liable for the funeral service
17 expenses are not sufficient to pay for the funeral service expenses; or (2) signed by the county
18 coroner or the county health officer, the attending physician or other person signing the death
19 certificate or the state medical examiner stating that the deceased person has no heirs or that
20 heirs have not been located after a reasonable search and that the deceased person had no
21 estate or the estate is pecuniarily unable to pay the costs associated with a funeral.

22 (c) Payment shall be made by the department to the person or persons who have furnished
23 the services and supplies for the indigent persons funeral service expenses or to the persons who
24 have advanced payment for same, as the department may determine, pursuant to appropriations
25 for expenditures made by the Legislature for such purpose: Provided, That, the department may
26 not pay for more than \$2,000 indigent funeral services in any fiscal year.

27 (d) For purposes of this section, ~~reasonable~~ “funeral service expenses” means expenses
28 for cremation services provided by a funeral director for the disposition of human remains:
29 Provided, That funeral service expenses may also include an alternative funeral service if the
30 family member otherwise responsible for reimbursement pursuant to subsection (a), section nine
31 of this article determines that cremation would have been objectionable to the decedent because
32 of his or her religion or is otherwise prohibited by federal or state law or regulation.

33 (e) For purposes of this section, “alternate funeral expenses” means expenses for services
34 provided by a funeral director for the disposition of human remains other than by cremation.

35 ~~(e)~~ (f) Any person who knowingly swears falsely in an affidavit required by this section
36 shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not more than \$1,000
37 or confined in ~~the county or regional~~ jail for a period of not more than six months, or both.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to provide for indigent burials.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law
and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.