

Stricken language would be deleted from and underlined language would be added to present law.

State of Arkansas
89th General Assembly
Regular Session, 2013

As Engrossed: H3/13/13
A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1298

By: Representative House
By: Senator J. Key

For An Act To Be Entitled

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE MANNER IN WHICH AND
CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE UNCLAIMED REMAINS OF A
VETERAN MAY BE INTERRED; TO ESTABLISH THE MISSING IN
AMERICA PROJECT ACT; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Subtitle

TO PROVIDE FOR THE MANNER IN WHICH AND
CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THE UNCLAIMED
CREMATED REMAINS OF A VETERAN MAY BE
INTERRED.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 20, Chapter 17, is amended to add an
additional subchapter to read as follows:

Subchapter 14 – Missing in America Project Act

DO NOT CODIFY. Findings and purpose.

It is found and determined by the General Assembly that:

- (1) Veterans have proudly served our country;
- (2) Veterans should be respected and honored; and
- (3) Veterans' unclaimed remains should be properly interred.

20-17-1401. Title.

This subchapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Missing in



America Project Act".

20-17-1402. Definitions.

As used in this subchapter:

(1) "Authorizing agent" means the person who assumes original and lawful possession of a body under §§ 20-17-102 or 20-17-701 et seq.;

(2) "DD form 93" means a United States Department of Defense Record of Emergency Data or its successor form;

(3)(A) "Funeral establishment" means an entity or person:

(i) Devoted to sheltering, caring, cremating, preparing, storing, or disposing of a human body; and

(ii) That is licensed by the State of Arkansas to embalm, cremate, care or dispose of a dead human body.

(B) "Funeral establishment" includes the office of a coroner or medical examiner of:

(i) A municipality of the State of Arkansas;

(ii) A county of the state; or

(iii) The state.

(4) "Internment" means the disposition of human remains by entombment, burial, or placement in an urn that is deposited above or below ground;

(5) "Next of kin" means the following in the order named if the person is eighteen (18) years of age or older and is of sound mind:

(A) First, if the decedent died while serving in any branch of the armed forces of the United States, the National Guard, or a reserve component of the armed forces, the next of kin is the person authorized to direct disposition on the DD Form 93;

(B) Second, a person appointed by the decedent in the decedent's declaration of final disposition;

(C) Third, a surviving spouse;

(D) Fourth, a surviving child, or if there is more than one (1) child of the decedent, the majority of the surviving children;

(E) Fifth, a surviving parent;

(F) Sixth, a surviving sibling;

(G) Seventh, a surviving grandparent;

(H) Eighth, the guardian of the decedent at the time of

the decedent's death; and

(I) Ninth, the person in the classes of the next degree of kinship, in descending order, under the laws of descent and distribution to inherit the estate of the decedent;

(6) "Person" means an individual, firm, partnership, copartnership, association, corporation, or other entity;

(7) "Unclaimed remains" means the remains of a decedent when the next of kin entitled to the right to control the disposition of the remains:

(A) Cannot be located; or

(B) Does not exercise his or her right of disposition within two (2) days of notification of the death of the decedent or within five (5) days of the decedent's death, whichever is earlier;

(8) "Veteran" means a person who served in the United States active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable;

(9) "Veterans cemetery" means a cemetery under the control of:

(A) The United States Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration; or

(B) The Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs; and

(10) "Veterans service organization" means an entity that is:

(A) A charitable organization that is tax exempt under the United States Internal Revenue Code; and

(B) Organized for the benefit of veterans and has been recognized by the United States Congress, including without limitation the Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the American Legion, the Legion of Honor, and the Vietnam Veterans of America, and the Missing in America Project.

20-17-1403. Verification that the decedent was a veteran.

(a)(1) The authorizing agent shall conduct a diligent search with the state and federal departments of veterans affairs to determine whether the decedent was a veteran if:

(A) The decedent is eighteen (18) years of age or older;

and

(B) The remains are determined to be unclaimed remains.

(2) The search must be completed within *five (5) days* after the decedent's death.

(b) The authorizing agent may share identifying information of the decedent with a veterans service organization or the state and federal departments of veterans affairs to:

(1) Determine whether the decedent was a veteran; and

(2) Verify that the decedent is entitled to veteran interment benefits.

20-17-1404. Authority to cremate unclaimed remains – Retention of the remains.

(a) An authorizing agent may authorize the cremation of an unclaimed deceased veteran's body.

(b) A funeral establishment that accepts the unclaimed remains of a veteran:

(1) Shall place the cremated remains in a container marked with the proper identification of the decedent;

(2)(A) Shall retain or arrange for the retention of the cremated remains until they are relinquished to:

(i) A veterans service organization;

(ii) The state or federal department of veterans affairs; or

(iii) The authorizing agent.

(B) The veterans service organization or state or federal department of veterans affairs must certify that the deceased veteran:

(i) Is entitled to interment benefits from the state or federal department of veterans affairs; and

(ii) Will be provided a dignified and honorable funeral at a veterans cemetery;

(3)(A) May dispose of the cremated remains in a manner permitted by law after *five (5) days* from the date of cremation if the cremated remains are not relinquished to a person as provided in subdivision (b)(2) of this section.

(B) The disposal of the remains must comply with the public health and welfare laws of the State of Arkansas.

20-17-1405. Verification that unclaimed remains are a veteran's -
Veteran status unknown at the time of final disposition of the body.

A funeral establishment that is also the authorizing agent that
determines the final disposition of the remains of a decedent and directs
that the body of the decedent be cremated:

(1) Shall place the cremated remains in a container marked with
the proper identification of the decedent;

(2) Shall store the cremated remains for *five (5) days* from the
date of cremation;

(3) May share identifying information of the decedent with a
veterans service organization or the state or federal departments of veterans
affairs to:

(A) Determine whether the decedent was a veteran; and

(B) Verify that the decedent is entitled to veteran
interment benefits; and

(4)(A) May dispose of the cremated remains after *five (5) days*
from the date of cremation if the cremated remains are not relinquished to:

(i) A veterans service organization;

(ii) The state or federal department of veterans
affairs; or

(iii) The next of kin of the decedent.

(B) The disposal of the remains of the decedent must comply with
the public health and welfare laws of the State of Arkansas.

20-17-1406. Transfer of a veteran's remains.

(a)(1) If the authorizing agent or funeral establishment determines
that the unclaimed remains are those of a veteran, the remains may be
relinquished to the control of:

(A) A veterans service organization; or

(B) The state or federal department of veterans affairs.

(2) The veterans service organization or state and federal
department of veterans affairs shall certify that the deceased veteran:

(A) Is entitled to interment benefits from the state or
federal department of veterans affairs; and

(B) Will be provided a dignified and honorable funeral at
a veterans cemetery.

(b) The funeral establishment shall:

(1) Establish and maintain a record identifying the veterans service organization or state or federal department of veterans affairs receiving the deceased veteran's remains; and

(2) Retain the records required under subdivision (b)(1) of this section for five (5) years from the date of transfer of the remains to the veterans service organization or the state or federal department of veterans affairs.

20-17-1407. Nonliability.

A person, funeral establishment, veterans service organization, or state or federal department of veterans affairs shall not be civilly liable for possessing, delivering, cremating, storing, disposing, or handling in any lawful manner the remains of a decedent under this subchapter.

20-17-1408. Reimbursement.

(a) If a deceased veteran has an estate, the estate shall be responsible for reimbursing a funeral establishment or authorized agent for all reasonable expenses incurred in relation to the disposition of the remains of the deceased veteran.

(b) *The Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs and county veterans' service officers shall provide technical assistance and information to funeral establishments, veterans service organizations, estates, and next of kin in order to facilitate a lawful application to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of obtaining reimbursement of the reasonable and authorized expenses for disposition of the remains of a qualified veteran.*

SECTION 2. Arkansas Code § 20-17-102(d) is amended to read as follows:

(d)(1) The right to control the disposition of the remains of a deceased person, the location, manner, and conditions of disposition, and arrangements for funeral goods and services to be provided vests in the following in the order named, ~~provided such~~ if the person is eighteen (18) years of age or older and is of sound mind:

(A) First, if the decedent died while serving in any branch of the armed forces of the United States, the National Guard, or a

reserve component of the armed forces, the decisions regarding the final disposition for the decedent shall be made by the person authorized to direct disposition on the DD Form 93 completed by the decedent prior to death;

(B) Second, a person appointed by the decedent in the decedent's declaration of final disposition executed before his or her death, in accordance with this section;

(C) Third, the surviving spouse;

(D) Fourth, the sole surviving child of the decedent or if there is more than one (1) child of the decedent, the majority of the surviving children;

(E)(i) Fifth, the surviving parent or parents of the decedent.

(ii) If one (1) of the surviving parents is absent, the remaining parent shall be vested with the rights and duties of this section after reasonable efforts have been unsuccessful in locating the absent surviving parent;

(F) Sixth, the surviving brother or sister of the decedent or if there is more than one (1) sibling of the decedent, the majority of the surviving siblings;

(G) Seventh, the surviving grandparent of the decedent or if there is more than one (1) surviving grandparent, the majority of the grandparents;

(H) Eighth, the surviving grandchild of the decedent or if there is more than one (1) surviving grandchild, the majority of the grandchildren;

(I) Ninth, the guardian of the person of the decedent at the time of the decedent's death, if one had been appointed;

(J)(i) Tenth, the person in the classes of the next degree of kinship, in descending order, under the laws of descent and distribution to inherit the estate of the decedent.

(ii) If there is more than one (1) person of the same degree, any person of that degree may exercise the right of disposition;

(K) Eleventh, any representative of state government or a political subdivision ~~thereof~~ of state government that has the statutory obligation to provide for the disposition of the remains of the decedent, including, but not limited to, any entity authorized to take possession of

the remains under § 20-17-701 et seq.; ~~and~~

(L) Twelfth, if the decedent is a veteran of any branch of the armed forces of the United States, the National Guard or a reserve component of the armed forces, a representative of the Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, or a veterans service organization as defined in the Missing in America Project Act, § 20-17-1401 et seq., that has statutory authority to direct or provide for the disposition of the remains of the decedent or to take possession of the remains under the Missing in America Project Act, § 20-17-1404 et seq.

~~(L)~~(2) In the absence of any person under this subsection, any other person willing to assume the responsibilities to act and arrange the final disposition of the decedent's remains, including without limitation the personal representative of the decedent's estate or the funeral director with custody of the body, after attesting in writing that a good faith effort has been made to no avail to contact the individuals under this subsection.

~~(2)~~(3)(A) Within each class, less than the majority of the class shall be vested with the rights of this section if they have used reasonable efforts to notify all other members of the class of their instructions and are not aware of any opposition to those instructions on the part of more than one-half (1/2) of all surviving children.

(B) In this subdivision, "class" means surviving children, siblings, grandparents, or grandchildren, where applicable.

SECTION 3. Arkansas Code § 20-17-703(b) is amended to read as follows:

(b) For the purpose of notifying the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences of its availability, ~~an "unclaimed body" is defined as~~ unclaimed body means a human body in the possession, charge, or control of the persons named in subsection (a) of this section for a period not to exceed forty-eight (48) hours, during which time ~~the right of any a~~ relative, next of kin, friend, ~~any~~ representative of a fraternal society of which the deceased was a member, veterans service organization as defined in the Missing in America Project Act, § 20-17-1401 et seq., the Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, or a representative of ~~any a~~ charitable or religious group ~~to~~ may claim the body for burial purposes ~~is recognized~~.

SECTION 4. Arkansas Code § 20-17-707(b) is amended to read as follows:

(b) During this time ~~any~~ a relative, next of kin, friend, ~~any~~ a representative of a fraternal society of which the deceased was a member, a veterans service organization as defined in the Missing in America Project Act, § 20-17-1401 et seq., the Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, or a representative of a charitable or religious group may claim the body for burial at his or her or its expense as stated in § 20-17-706(a)-(c).

/s/House