



SEDGWICK COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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SEDGWICKCOUNTY.ORG

Dear Chair Kessler, Vice Chair Schmoe, Ranking Minority Member Miller, and Committee members:

I am writing on behalf of the Sedgwick County Board of County Commissioners regarding HB 2331 relating to the final disposition of unclaimed cremated remains and associated property.

The lack of statutory guidance for the disposal of unclaimed cremated remains and associated property was brought to our attention by Dr. Shelly Steadman, Ph.D. As the Director of the Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center, Dr. Steadman is acutely aware of the issues caused by this lack of guidance. The RFSC seeks to ensure the suitable disposition of remains when they are either unable to locate next of kin or when next of kin refuses to accept responsibility for their relative's remains. Currently, our only option is to hold the cremated remains and property indefinitely in storage.

Unfortunately, Sedgwick County has only seen an increase in the number of unclaimed individuals each year. For context, from 2010-2015 the County typically handled disposition for 10-20 bodies each year. In 2016, the number increased to 33. Sadly, it has continued to grow since then. In 2023, Sedgwick County released 93 bodies to our contracting provider for cremation and storage. Currently, there are over 500 boxes of cremains, many of which also have associated property, in storage. Aside from these individuals deserving an appropriate and respectful final resting place, the ongoing storage of the cremains and property presents an ongoing financial burden for the County.

The law is currently silent on this issue. HB 2331 is an opportunity to correct this oversight and aid district coroners in ensuring that these individuals are transitioned from Coroner custody to a final placement. Passing HB 2331 is the right thing to do financially, but also morally.

We appreciate your consideration of our testimony in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Baty".

Ryan Baty, Chairman
Board of County Commissioners of Sedgwick County