

How Care Facility Staff and Administrators Can Support Vermont Families in Caring for Their Own Dead

Vermont families have the legal right to custody and control of their own dead. One of the greatest challenges to home funeral families is that many facilities have policies that require immediate or timely removal of the body. These may make it difficult for families to make their own arrangements for completing paperwork and transportation. While some families may have plans to move their loved one home rather than to a funeral home, others may only learn they have this right through well-crafted body release policies and procedures. Nurses, chaplains, and social workers can convey accurate information to families about their right to handle after-death care and assist families in making the transition from facility to home go smoothly.

Legal Authority of Families

In Vermont, the legislative authority for families to act as unpaid funeral services practitioners is found in [18 V.S.A. § 5207](#). Certificate furnished family; burial-transit permit

“Within 24 hours after death, the death certificate shall be made available upon request to the family of the deceased, if any, or the undertaker or person who has charge of the body. The certificate shall be filed with the person issuing the burial-transit permit obtained by the person who has charge of the body before such dead body shall be buried, entombed, or removed from the town. When the death certificate is so filed, the officer or person shall immediately issue a burial-transit permit under legal restrictions and safeguards.”

Ways You Are Empowered to Assist Families

1. Determine who is responsible for writing or revising body release policies and procedures. Check to see if the existing policy is in compliance with the law regarding home funeral families’ rights to care for their own dead.
2. Ask families, *“What plans can we assist you in making?”* instead of *“What funeral home do you want us to call?”* See *How Celebrants/Clergy/Chaplains Can Support Vermont Home Funeral Families*.
3. Provide the following information alongside any information about local funeral homes: Under Vermont law, families may conduct any or all tasks commonly performed by a funeral home, except embalming (which is not required by Vermont law). This may include:
 - caring for the deceased (for example, bathing and dressing);
 - sheltering the deceased at home;
 - filing death notice, handling death certificate/transportation/disposition permit;
 - transporting the body home or to another location for care and viewing (sometimes called a wake or vigil), and to place of final disposition;
 - making arrangements for any ceremony and for final disposition (for example, with a cemetery or crematory, or obtaining county planning commission permission for a home burial).

Additional Information

- National End-of-Life Doula Alliance www.nedalliance.org
- Funeral Consumers Alliance www.funerals.org
- *10 Ways Care Facility Staff Can Support Home Funeral Families*
- *How Celebrants/Clergy/Chaplains Can Support Vermont Home Funeral Families*