Recommendations of the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association and the Massachusetts Senior Care Association to Facilitate the Transfer of Deceased Residents from Nursing Homes

These recommendations are considered a best practice and each nursing home should assess their ability to follow these recommendations. It is important that funeral establishments and nursing homes work together to collaborate their knowledge and practice to expedite the transfer of a decedent in order that a family may proceed to make plans for their loved one.

Both funeral establishments and nursing homes must comply with all CDC guidelines specific for health care workers, nursing homes and other facilities. The recommendations below are designed to provide practical suggestions as we work together to honor the deceased and serve our communities during this difficult time.

To help expedite response by the funeral establishment the following is recommended:

- When a nursing facility notifies the physician of a resident’s death, the nursing facility should remind the physician that the death certificate must be expedited to ensure proper disposition of the decedent.

- Verbal consent must be documented from next of kin and contact information immediately available for a funeral establishment. Funeral establishments cannot take legal possession of the decedent without this information. In addition, funeral establishments are under orders not to shelter decedent remains until the next of kin or an authorized person can be located.

- Funeral homes are exempted under the HIPAA regulations and must be advised if COVID-19 is the cause of death when transfer is requested. Physicians should include COVID-19 on the death certificate since COVID-19 patients are being given priority at some crematories and cemeteries.

- Funeral homes, like all health care providers, are experiencing a shortage of PPE equipment. All cases will be treated as infectious and universal precautions and appropriate PPE will be used. Whenever possible, funeral home staff will provide their own PPE. All funeral home staff should be screened according to current protocols when entering the nursing facility.

- Assuming most nursing homes don’t have access to or no longer use shrouds, remains should be wrapped in a sheet with airways covered to minimize inadvertent aerosolization. If PPE supply allows, a surgical or cloth mask should be placed over the airway.

- The nursing home should provide two copies of the nurse pronouncement so funeral directors can sign both copies and eliminate the need for funeral establishment staff to go to another area in the nursing home to make a copy.

- The practice of escorting a decedent to the transfer vehicle with a facility quilt should cease at this time.

- Transfer of decedent will require a coordinated effort and outreach between the funeral establishment and nursing home. Transfers may not be as expeditious as in the past, but the funeral home staff and the nursing home should work together to coordinate the transfer. If possible, the nursing home staff will meet the funeral establishment at the designated entrance either with the decedent or to obtain the funeral establishments stretcher to transfer the decedent for removal from the nursing home.