

SCSS meeting with AFSA August 10, 2023

Jumped into the meeting with the concern brought forward from Park Memorial as well as from Serenity about the delays with approving applications causing such grief/concerns/problems with families that they are verbally threatening Funeral Directors, even up to threats of physical abuse. The biggest problem is that even when the family authorizes the **Consent to Disclose Personal Information** for the funeral director, there still isn't enough information given to the funeral director to intelligently answer the family's question "Why is this taking so long?"

Response was one of concern, and it was indicated by AFSA that these instances are the extreme, but families are generally getting upset and frustrated with delays. It was suggested that in these extreme instances that need to be escalated, funeral homes can set up a phone call with the family, the funeral director and the upper level SCSS directors (Slavko Nohas and/or Joyce Pittman) to discuss the delayed/complicated issues.

Brad Geddes stated that they are currently tracking an average of 15 to 30 days for payment to the funeral home from the date of application submission. He did add though that, as this is the government, that would be **15 to 30 business days** so the actual wait time could be upward of 45 consecutive calendar days.

A question was also brought up by membership about the payment cycles. Their funeral home has been told by call centre workers that cheques are cut once a month and another time they were told that cheques are written every ten days.

Slavko said neither is true. Once the application is approved, it is then sent for payment to be processed and is added in amongst all the other benefits that their department pays out. The batch payments are processed twice a week.

Discussion was had about how in depth the privacy laws were regarding the funeral directors not getting enough information to assist the family. Chris Jong brought up a great point about getting certain specific info to funeral directors without contravening any sort of personal information regulations. If SCSS could send out a status update that shows a checklist of things that are causing delays with the specific application, it would be helpful. For example: a list showing things like, "can't contact responsible survivor"; "need bank information"; "missing signature"; etc.

This would be a document that could be emailed to both the family and the funeral home so everyone is up to date with what the status of the application currently is.

The SCSS team agreed this is a great idea and could be fairly easy to implement. They also mentioned that with the upcoming upgrades to the digital portal (e-signatures are

getting closer!) there could potentially be a status update section on each application. Funeral directors will be allowed access to the Portal if the family allows it, so they will be able to see the status updates.

The way it was described and how I pictured it was a lot like when you track a package that's out for delivery: **"Application received → Application Being Reviewed → Application needs further information → Information Received → Application Approved → Sent for Payment"**

This is not how they said it...just how I pictured it in my head. The actual process remains to be seen.

Also discussed was the issue of families applying for full amount, receiving approval then changing the plan to something less and pocketing the change, as well as those families who are approved and directly receive the payment, but don't pay the funeral home.

If a funeral director/home runs into these situations, they are to email Slavko and/or Joyce for follow up. Any fraud type instances are to be reported to SCSS immediately. In the case of the family not paying the funeral home even though they received the money from SCSS, there was no real solution. They suggested we use our regular means of financial safety (ie. Get them to pay up front), but this doesn't really solve the problem as most families don't have the money to pay up front anyway... and that is why they are making the application for funds. This issue may need to be addressed again if AFSA is finding that funeral homes are running into these issues often. Granted, when the funeral director helps a family fill out the application, funeral directors are ensuring the payment is being sent to the funeral home.

Meeting was closed with kind words from the SCSS team thanking AFSA for their input. They also mentioned that for the most part, the interactions they are having with the funeral homes have been positive.

I responded with thanks for them taking the time to meet with us again and mentioned that we as well are pleased with how these meetings proceed and that it's nice to not only have these meetings but that there is action from the SCSS team afterwards which shows that they are not only hearing us, but they are truly listening.