

Introduction

Georgia law (36-12-5) requires that the county where an indigent person dies is responsible for their burial. Counties were given the responsibility to establish its own indigence criteria within the minimum standards dictated by this law.

As early as the 1930's Fulton County was using prison labor to dig graves. Public property in the Fulton Industrial Boulevard area served as a cemetery. In the late 1960's the county discontinued using prison labor and public grounds and contracted with two (2) cemeteries (Lincoln and Crest Lawn) to handle the burials. The County Chaplain's office was created in 1970 to officiate over indigent burials. Crest Lawn Memorial Gardens handled all burials from 1973 until 1990 at which time Forest Lawn Memorial Gardens was awarded the contract.

Funeral home establishments have never been contracted, but participated for a standard fee approved by the county. Until 1981, Fulton DFCS was able to recoup some monies that were expended for county burials by making claims for the social security and veteran benefits of the deceased individuals. However, after 1981, federal policies were enacted that allowed death benefits to be payable only to spouses and children.

Fulton County has traditionally had a higher demand for indigent burials due to several factors:

1. Fulton has the largest number of households in the state
2. Since 1990, funeral homes have increasingly referred more families to our agency.
3. Fulton County has several large public hospitals.
4. Fulton County has a large homeless population.
5. Most hospices or treatment centers for AIDS related illnesses are located in Fulton County.
6. Publicity by the media has made this program more visible to the public than in most counties.

Georgia law has a minimum and maximum payment standard; it allows county governing authorities to enter into its own payment negotiations to arrange for decent burials. Due to Fulton County's volume of burials and the demands it made on funeral homes, the county increased its payment standards in 1990 from \$250 to \$600 for adult funeral services and pays a separate contracted amount for cemetery services.

Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services manage the County Burial Program at the request of Fulton County governing authority. The County provides a yearly budget for Fulton County DFCS to establish eligibility and arrange for the disposition of remains of individuals who die within the County who are considered indigent. This program is managed in collaboration with the Fulton County Manager's

office, the Clerk of the Commissioner's office the Chaplain's office, participating funeral homes and a contracted private cemetery.

Fulton County DFCS's Burial program is used to pay for the services provided by funeral home establishments. The County Finance Department pays for the cemetery interment services through their general fund.

Current Responsibility for Program (Overview)

1. Fulton County – has legal authority and obligation to bear expenses for burial of indigents.
2. Clerk of the County Commission – prepares and maintains record of information on all burials and approves invoices submitted for payment from cemetery.
3. County Chaplain – gives approved for interment to the cemetery
4. Finance Department – authorizes payment of invoices from the Clerk of the County Commission.
5. DFCD – arranges for burial and pays the funeral home expenses.

Fulton County DFCS rules and regulations for arranging burial and paying funeral homes include:

1. Working with funeral homes that already have the body and determining if they will accept the county fee to continue handling the body.
2. Allowing the family to select a funeral home as long as that funeral home will accept the county fee and provide, at least, the minimum services requested.
3. Using a list of funeral homes that have agreed to accept county burials if no preference are made.
4. Accommodating family wishes to the full extent allowed within set guidelines.
5. Requesting that funeral homes provide a decent, dignified service with minimum requirements for handling the deceased.
6. Setting up income and resource standards to determine indigence.
7. Arranging/coordinating burial from receipt of the deceased to interment.
8. Submitting forms and authorizing payment to funeral homes.
9. Evaluating exceptions to policy with county input as the need arises.

DFCS philosophy in managing this program:

1. We value the inherent worth and dignity of the deceased and the family.
2. We value the availability in the community of resources necessary to enable families to provide for a dignified burial service and we make every effort to accommodate those resources within the financial constraints of the program.
3. We value the equal and expeditious access by the individuals and families to those resources which are available through the department.
4. We value the involvement of the local community in providing for its members.

Fulton County Burial Procedures

Burial of Indigent Person

STATEMENT OF POLICY: Whenever any person dies in Fulton County, and the decedent family and immediate relatives are indigent and unable to provide for a decent interment, the governing authority of the county shall make funds available to provide for a dignified interment or to reimburse such person as may have expended the cost thereof voluntarily, the exact amount thereof to be determined by the Board of Commissioners. Section 36-12-5 of the Georgia Coded applies to the legal authority and obligation on the part of the county in bearing interment expenses of the indigent.

PROCEDURE:

- (1) When Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services receive a request for burial, it reviews the indigent status of the individual, as well as, the financial status of immediate family members according to the rules and regulations of the department. If indigence is authenticated, a Request for Indigent Burial Form is certified and forwarded to the Clerk of the Commissioners.
- (2) Before the Department of Family and Children Services contacts a funeral home, the Department allows the family of the decedent to identify or express a preference for a funeral home. If there is no family members with whom to communicate regarding the funeral home of choice, a funeral home is selected on a rotational basis from a list of volunteers maintained and updated by the Department. DFCS makes contact with the funeral home to determine if they will handle funeral arrangements for the county's fee and provide information on the program standards and identifying information needed for the death certificate.