

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

FEBRUARY 9, 2021

Burial Costs: Dignity for COVID-19 Victims and Support for their Families

Over 17,000 families are grieving the loss of a family member who died of COVID-19 in Los Angeles County. Their profound grief is often compounded by the fact that residents do not have the funding required to cover the costs of their loved one's burial, which is often significant. In California, according to various sources, the average burial cost is between \$8,000 to \$12,000. With the significant economic downturn caused by COVID-19, that amount becomes even harder to pay for many families who are struggling just to pay for basic needs.

The economic burden of burial costs is particularly felt by those in the Latinx community, which has been hard hit by all aspects of the pandemic. Data shows that the number of Latinx residents dying from COVID-19 each week increased by 1,000% from November 2020 to January 2021. Tragically, their families are disproportionately impacted by the loss of life and many are unable to properly grieve because of the financial burden of burial costs.

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021

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(H.R. 133) enacted on December 27, 2020 appropriates \$2 billion to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide financial assistance to individuals and households for COVID-19-related funeral expenses, covering eligible funeral expenses that were incurred through December 31, 2020. The legislation requires FEMA to provide this assistance through the States and waives the 25 percent State match. The legislation further specifies that there is no cost sharing requirement associated with this assistance. FEMA is reviewing the legislation and evaluating potential options for implementation to make assistance for eligible expenses available retroactively.

Los Angeles County has a responsibility to provide the means for a proper burial, allowing dignity for those who have died from COVID-19 and closure for their mourning families. To that end, the County should advocate to leverage immediately the \$2 billion dedicated by FEMA for burial costs associated with COVID-19 related deaths. Although program details are forthcoming from FEMA, time is of the essence – human dignity and healing for our families cannot wait.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to assess the feasibility of implementing the FEMA burial cost program, pending further clarification on the program guidelines from FEMA, including how it will be implemented in California, to provide reimbursement of burial costs for Los Angeles County residents and report back in thirty (30) days. The report should include:

- a specific focus on the financial model required for implementation.
- a plan for equitable distribution of the funds, which should include providing culturally and linguistically-competent information for residents in

areas with high COVID-19 death rates to access the program.

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