

IMPORTANT MESSAGE

As-salamu alaikum

March 27, 2020 – This message is directed to our Muslim community.

The Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) is the regulator of death care in the Province of Ontario in the public interest. What does that mean exactly? It means that we are empowered by legislation (*Funeral, Burial & Cremation Services Act 2002*) to protect the public by ensuring that funeral services, cremation and cemeteries are operated by qualified individuals licensed by us. We set the standards of training, conduct and many other obligations to make certain that our dead are cared for in a dignified and safe manner, and that the public is protected and treated fairly and safely. We do this on behalf of the citizens of Ontario, and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

We are aware that the Muslim faith typically requires that funeral rites, including transportation and preparation of the deceased, are performed by friends, family or other volunteers within a Mosque.

However, these are extraordinary times dealing with a new and extremely contagious disease, COVID-19. We need extraordinary measures in handling decedents that may be infected with COVID-19 and the friends, family and other volunteers that may be carrying the virus and potentially infect others. We have prepared “**Guidance for the Muslim Community in Handling Human Remains**” to assist you carrying-out these activities.

How the Virus Spreads:

COVID 19 is thought to spread via droplets from the respiratory tract of infected people when the cough sneeze or otherwise expel droplets from their nose or mouth. People in close contact (less than six feet) of an

infected person can become infected through these droplets. A person can carry the virus and infect others even though they shown no symptoms. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

Who is most at risk:

- Healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Close contacts of persons with COVID-19 also are at elevated risk of exposure.
- Travelers returning from affected international locations – (level of risk dependent on where they traveled.)

Some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness:

- Older adults, with risk increasing by age.
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, lung disease.

The Bereavement Authority is seeking your cooperation and **strongly urges the Muslim community to only use licensed professionals** to assist with transportation of the body and preparation of the body including cleansing and casketing. To allow the current practice of using untrained volunteers or others with limited training is risky, especially during preparation of the body before burial. Even if trained, there is a shortage and unavailability of proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and we doubt that non-professionals could even obtain it under the current circumstances.

We are making this request with the greatest respect and sensitivity to the rituals and customs of the Muslim faith. We understand that caring for a deceased loved-one, including all the rites or ceremonies traditionally provided in a place of worship, is your legal choice. But for the sake of the safety of everyone and to prevent the spread of Covid-19, we must strongly recommend that trained, licenced professionals be used at this time. Professionals that can be relied on to have appropriate training and protective equipment are those licenced by the BAO as funeral directors or

transfer services. Licensed professionals can be located on our website www.thebao.ca

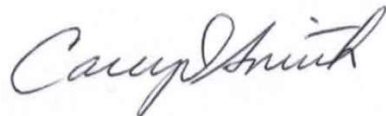
The BAO will advise our licensed professionals to expect calls for assistance from the Muslim community. They will be reminded that:

- a)** the family may want an Imam to be present along with the licensed professionals at the time of preparing the body for burial;
- b)** the same gender of the deceased is to handle the body and especially at the time of preparing the body for burial.

For further information, please contact karie.draper@thebao.ca

In preparing this notice, the BAO is grateful for the assistance of:

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