July 1, 2021

As a courtesy to Funeral Directors who may participate or have participated in South Portland’s General Assistance (GA) Program, please find our annual information relative to the state’s program and requirements pertaining to GA.

GA is a state mandated, municipally administered financial assistance program. It was designed to be the program of “last resort” for residents of the community who are unable to provide for their basic needs. Basic needs are defined as shelter/rent, utilities, medical, food and non-food. The City of South Portland GA program will pay for direct burial and cremation expenses, up to the allowed maximum amounts, for eligible deceased persons who leave no money or assets to pay for the burial/cremation costs and who have no legally liable relatives, either individually or as a group, possessing a financial capacity to pay for the costs either in lump sum or by means of a budgeted payment arrangement with the funeral home.

There are responsibilities relative to burials and cremations on both the administrator’s side and the funeral director’s side. Regarding the funeral director’s responsibilities: State law requires the funeral director to notify the GA administrator prior to the burial or cremation or by the end of 3 business days following the funeral director’s receipt of the body, whichever is earlier. You may contact GA at 207-767-7617 to request an appointment.

Please keep in mind, when a funeral director is requesting GA to pay for a burial or cremation and the GA administrator does not receive prior notice and thus no opportunity to approve expenses, the municipality has no legal obligation to pay.

Prior to making a request for assistance, the funeral director is required to make an effort to identify the availability of resources to pay for the burial or cremation, including but not limited to the estate of the deceased – including bank accounts, life insurance policies and prepaid burial plans, financial capacity of legally liable relatives, program benefits such as veterans and Social Security death benefits, and financial contributions from any other source, such as friends, community collections, donations, GoFundMe accounts, etc.

Prior to a meeting, the funeral director is to make an effort to identify the availability of resources to pay for the burial or cremation including: a description of the deceased’s estate to the extent it is known and the names and addresses of the legally liable family members defined as those who live or own property in Maine and have sufficient income to pay for
the burial or cremation in lump sum payments or by a reasonable installment arrangement. Effective November 1, 2017, grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren of the deceased, whether or not living in or owning property in Maine, and the spouse or registered domestic partner of the deceased are financially responsible for the burial or cremation of the deceased to the extent those relatives, individually or as a group, have a financial capacity to pay for the burial or cremation either in lump sum or by means of a budgeted payment arrangement with the funeral home. With regard to the financial capacity of legally liable relatives, the test to be applied is one of capacity to contribute financially, not the willingness to do so.

It is not expected that the funeral director has all this information at the time of initial contact. Since the funeral director must make an initial request to the GA administrator within three business days following the receipt of the body, the funeral director should be contacting the municipality whenever he or she suspects that there will not be enough money to cover the burial or cremation costs. The city will work with the funeral director to determine if general assistance would be the right route to pursue.

If deemed eligible, municipalities are responsible for paying the direct burial or cremation expenses, up to the ordinance maximums, of anyone who passes leaving no money or assets to pay the burial expenses and who has no liable relatives who are financially able to pay the burial or cremation costs (§ 4313). The amounts are up to $1,475.00 for a burial and up to $1,025.00 for cremation.

GA costs are paid by the taxpayers’ dollars and GA costs are reimbursed by the State at a 70% rate.

Processing of payments within Accounts Payable is as follows:

1. If a client is deemed eligible for GA on Monday through Wednesday, the check will be processed in A/P on Friday of that week and mailed directly to the Funeral Home.
2. If a client is deemed eligible for GA on Thursday or Friday, the check will be processed in A/P the following Friday and mailed directly to the Funeral Home.

Thank you for your support of the General Assistance program. If I can answer any questions, please feel free to contact the office at 207-767-7617.

Best,

Kathleen Babeu
Social Services Director
City of South Portland