

SECTION 19 - UNCLAIMED OR INDIGENT REMAINS

I. INTRODUCTION

Shelby County will provide cremations for indigent persons who die in Shelby County, in accordance with Alabama Code Section 38-8-2. State law requires counties to pay the “necessary expenses” to be cremated when the deceased person has insufficient resources to pay those expenses. As a county-funded cremation, only the basic expenses associated with the cremation will be paid for by Shelby County through the Coroner’s annual budget.

The C/DC shall follow the following guidelines:

1. The C/DC shall make every effort to locate next of kin.
2. The C/DC, if he believes the case will be classified as indigent, shall attempt to locate, identify and secure all personal property that may be liquidated for the purpose of providing for cremation expenses.
3. The C/DC shall discuss the responsibility of cremation/burial costs with next of kin, families or friends.
4. The C/DC shall not offer an indigent cremation as an option to families.
5. In the event next of kin cannot be located or next of kin have refused to provide for final arrangements, the Shelby County Coroner shall be notified for further direction.

All conversations with next of kin, wherein the next of kin refuses to take financial responsibility, or attempts to locate next of kin shall be documented either on the Report of Death, ROD.

II. GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR INDIGENT CREMATIONS

1. If the death has already been designated as a “Coroner’s Case”, the Coroner’s Office will have already been involved with attempting to locate next of kin, other family or friends of the decedent. If those attempts are unsuccessful or those contacted have insufficient funds to pay for the funeral home costs, the Coroner’s Office will cremate the decedent.
2. If the death has occurred in a hospital or other situation where the case was not initially considered a “Coroner’s Case”, the hospital, individuals involved will contact the Coroner’s Office. At time of contact, the case becomes a “Coroner’s Case” and the C/DC shall prepare all documentation usual and customary in a Coroner’s Case. The Coroner’s Office will then attempt to locate next of kin, other family or friends of the decedent. If those attempts are unsuccessful or those contacted have insufficient funds to pay for the funeral home costs, the Coroner’s Office will cremate the decedent.
3. Some other potential resources for payment of funeral home costs that will be explored by the Coroner’s Office and funeral homes will be VA benefits, social security benefits and body donation to science.

III. Veterans

Honorably discharged veterans, who are unclaimed by next of kin or whose next of kin is unable to be located, regardless of the circumstances or jurisdiction of death, shall be interred as directed by the commissioner of veterans services, or the commissioner's representative, superseding other provisions .

IV. NON-CORONER CASES

A decedent whose death does not meet the criteria for coroner jurisdiction does not automatically become a coroner case if they remain unclaimed by next of kin or if next of kin are unable to be located.

If the body remains unclaimed by the next of kin for 3 months or more the coroner make a demand for the body.