



FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P. O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

Newsletter

Spring 2021

Reimbursement for Covid-19 related funeral expenses now available!

To ease some of the financial burden caused by the pandemic, FEMA announced reimbursement for funeral related expenses resulting from Covid-19 related deaths.

Who is eligible?

The applicant must be a U.S. citizen, noncitizen national or qualified immigrant of the U.S., although the deceased does not need a specific legal status.

What are the requirements?

Applicant must show funeral expenses were incurred after Jan. 20, 2020. The death must have occurred in the U.S. The death certificate must list the cause of death as COVID-19, may have been caused by or was likely a result of COVID-19.

What expenses are covered?

Most funeral service expenses are covered such as transfer of remains, casket or urn, burial plot or cremation niche, marker or headstone, clergy or officiant services, the funeral ceremony, use of funeral home equipment or staff, interment, costs associated with death certificates and additional expenses required by local or state laws.

What are the limits and restrictions?

Funeral assistance may not duplicate benefits received from burial or funeral insurance, financial assistance received from voluntary agencies, government programs, or other sources.

How to apply?

To apply, call 844-684-6333. The TTY number is 800-462-7585. Office hours are Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Expect the call to last 20 minutes. There is no online application process. Applicants can apply for COVID-Funeral Assistance after all funeral expenses are incurred. This is considered a one-time reimbursement. Payments are made by check or direct deposit. Please visit the FEMA web site for more detailed information and important specific program requirements and restrictions.

<https://www.fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance>

Special Consumer Fraud Alert: FEMA has received reports of scammers reaching out to people offering to register them for funeral assistance. FEMA does not contact people before they register for assistance.

2020 Annual Meeting and Program

On Sunday October 18, 2020, we held a “virtual” meeting via Zoom. Treasurer Joan Pillsbury sent a report showing a healthy balance of \$10,644.71 in the FCAWM bank account as our fiscal year closed (August 31), thanks to generous donations to this nonprofit organization. Expenses had totaled \$3871.45 that year.

These candidates for the Board of Trustees were elected: Elizabeth Bristow and Julie Johnson for three year terms, Joan Pillsbury and Sandy Ward for two years each.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS for this year:

President: Cecile Richard
Vice-President: Jim Couchon
Treasurer: Joan Pillsbury
Secretary: Kate Mason

Following the business meeting, we presented our educational program, 2:30-4:00 pm:

“Challenges Facing Death Care Today”

- Challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by Cecile Richard
- Indigent burial, and unclaimed bodies by Sandy Ward
- Infant deaths and prenatal deaths by Elizabeth Bristow
- How to respect/honor various cultures and practices by Jim Couchon



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Editor this issue: Sandy Ward

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral or memorial service.

Priority Projects in 2021

Website: It is time – high time! – to add a search box and improve the functionality of our website. The software used for decades is no longer supported, so we'll be starting over on a new platform, an opportunity for a fresh design. Ideas welcome!

Education: We are eager to resume outreach to senior centers, churches, and other community groups as they reopen to the public. Please help spread the word that we offer speakers, with presentations on various topics, at no charge.

Infant Coffins: Elizabeth Bristow is leading a project with several FCAWM volunteers to construct and donate six small wooden coffins for Empty Arms Bereavement Support, a nonprofit dedicated to serving individuals and families in Western Massachusetts whose babies have died through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. See page 6 for more information.

Diversity: We seek new Trustee candidates with varying cultures and perspectives. We welcome nominations (and volunteers for our Nominating Committee, which convenes mid-summer). We plan to participate in Diversity-On-Board, a program of United Way of Pioneer Valley that aims to connect potential board members with nonprofits seeking diversity.

Funeral Rule: We will monitor progress towards revision/expansion of the federal Funeral Rule. The Federal Trade Commission is still processing the input we gave in spring 2020. Many FCAWM members helped lobby for a rule that funeral homes must post General Price Lists online. THANK YOU! We are confident that we will (eventually) win this campaign.

*If you can help with any of these projects, please contact us at fcawmass@gmail.com or 413-376-4747. **Thanks!***



Meet the newest members...

of the FCAWM Board of Trustees



Elizabeth Bristow, FCAWM Trustee



Julia Johnson, FCAWM Trustee

“I’ve found my people!”

That was my thought when I attended my first FCAWM annual meeting in October 2019. I instantly knew that I wanted to be a part of this passionate, dedicated group whose mission it is to educate people of their rights and options surrounding end of life practices.

As a psychotherapist, an end-of-life doula and a hospice volunteer, I have found both the wisdom of the group members and the vast amount of information available on the FCAWM website to be invaluable resources. My particular interests lie in the reemergence of traditional practices, such as home funerals and natural burials.



Recently, I was honored to have been voted in as a FCAWM Board Member after having volunteered and assisting with the updating of their (our) media press-release list.

I learned about FCA through literature I had picked up on Green Burial in MA some years ago at a health fair on the Amherst Green. My interest in learning more about funerals and burials, traditional or otherwise, stems from a desire to advocate for an open dialogue around death, dying, and wishes for final disposition.

I would like to help to take away the stigma around the discussion of death and dying and to learn more about funerals and burials through my volunteerism as a board member with FCAWM. My plan is to assist consumers through advocacy at the state level by collaborating with FCAEM. More to come.



Interview with long-term member Sally Lawton

Sally Lawton has been a member of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts (FCAWM), formerly known as the Springfield Memorial Society, since 1965, early in the history of this consumer-led movement. This photo shows Sally at our October 2019 annual meeting. Her friend Joanna Brown, a former FCAWM Trustee, had accompanied her to that meeting and later suggested that we interview Sally about the early history.



On May 6, 2021, Sandy Ward and Joanna travelled to Sally's home in Westhampton and enjoyed a delightful conversation with Sally, sitting outside in warm sunshine amid spring flowers.

“How did I come to join? My dad and I, and also my husband Ed Lawton, read Jessica Mitford's book, *The American Way of Death*, so we were primed to do something, but we didn't know what.”

Sally said her mother's health, with a diagnosis of a type of dementia, had triggered decisions to move to a home on one level and to combine households to assist her father who had been caring for her mother all by himself. “I had three young kids and I thought that he could help me taking care of my children, to have another adult present. At that time in 1961 when we bought this house he was 71 years old, had been retired for a few years and was in pretty good health. It was good for him to live with us and it was good for us to have him. He lived to be 99. The children knew Granddad really well.”

“My father and my mother had arranged to have their bodies after death donated to medical schools in Boston, one to Harvard and one to BU, so that had already been done, before they moved out here. In 1967 my mother died here at home from pneumonia.”

“When the Memorial Society was started, we wanted to go; we wanted to support it. Ed and I were interested, but of course at that time we were very much younger so it wasn't a pressing matter for either of us, so we went and participated. We were just interested in general, about the law and what the law permitted and what you could do. There was a need to change the laws and a need to inform the public about how the laws should be changed. That was an issue, a major issue. And there was an attempt to help people economize and not spend a lot of money. That has not changed, I think.”

Joanna asked about outreach and education. “I think they had speakers, such as doctors. I know that I've received newsletters over the years from time to time; there's been a break sometimes and then it resumed.” Sandy asked about price surveys. Sally replied, “That was one of the early things they did. It was an ongoing bit of information that people need.”

At one point Sally mentioned moving east in 1951 from California, where she had been teaching in a Palo Alto school. Sandy responded, “I didn't know your history, and you didn't know that I was involved with the Funeral Consumers Alliance (then called Memorial Society of the Mid-Peninsula) that met in Palo Alto! I went to meetings and was getting their newsletter until I accepted a job offer in 1992 from Mount Holyoke College. When I notified that society to take me off their mailing list, they said, ‘You're a lifetime member; we'll transfer you to the Springfield group.’ So that's how I became a member of the Springfield Memorial Society,” said Sandy.

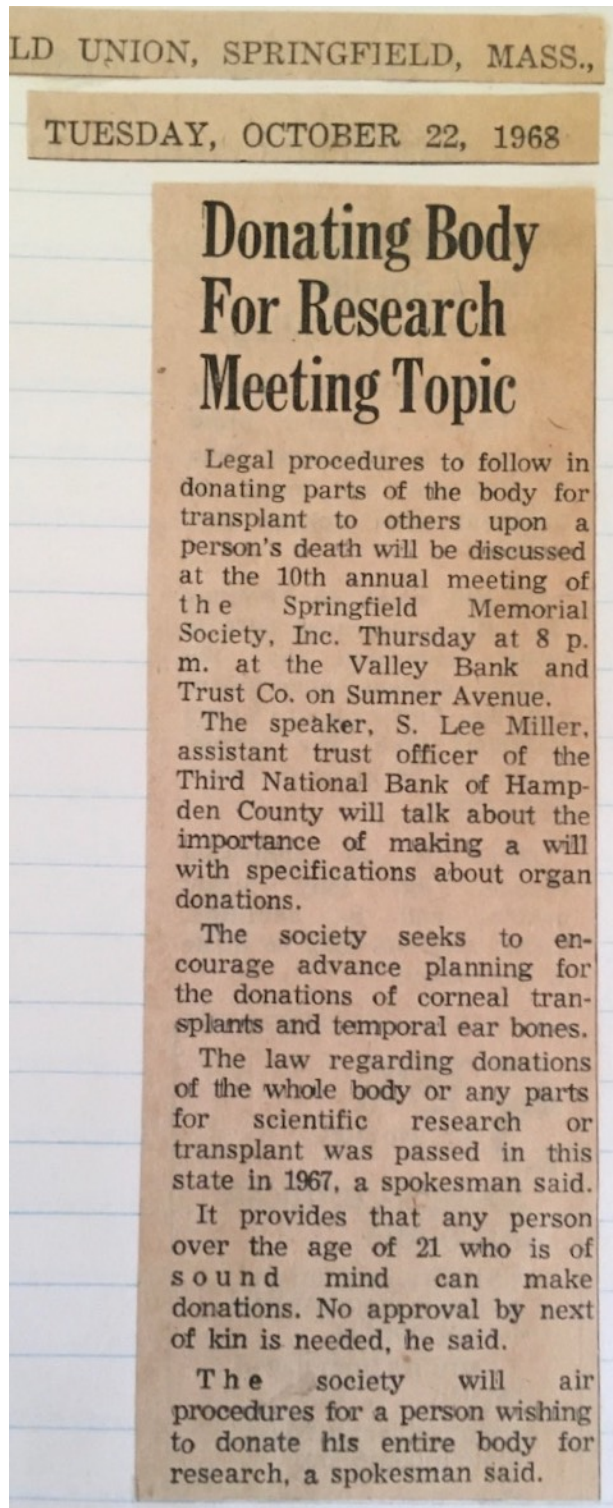
Sally ended our interview by saying, “Like a lot of other people, we got involved because of our parents. I continue to support the work of FCAWM because I believe in it.”




Thank you Sally!

Speaking of the early years of this organization...

Here are clippings from September 1965 and October 1968 about Springfield Memorial Society talks:



Note: Sandy Ward found these among old files saved by previous officers. This summer we will meet with Aaron Rubinstein, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass-Amherst, to discuss preserving our archives. He writes, "We have a number of collections that document aspects of death and dying, including the records of the Association for Gravestone Studies, and FCAWM also fits perfectly with our social change and innovation and entrepreneurship focuses." Eva Moseley, retired archivist and Green Burial MA (GBM) board member, has arranged for GBM to donate its records to UMass. We thank Eva for encouraging this connection. 

Building Infant Coffins to Donate to Empty Arms Bereavement Services

On May 24, 2021, several members of the FCAWM board gathered to build infant coffins to be donated to Empty Arms Bereavement, a non-profit organization which supports individuals and families in Western Massachusetts whose babies have died through miscarriage, still birth, or early infant death. With the guidance of Jon Lagreze, woodworker extraordinaire, and through the generosity of RK Miles, our volunteers had appropriate tools and supplies to begin construction of small pine coffins. The group met for four hours and will meet again next week to finish the six coffins.

Instructions for these environmentally-sustainable, affordable coffins will soon be made available via the FCAWM website. For more photos of this project, visit: <https://sward.smugmug.com/Other/FCA-1/Building-Infant-Coffins/>



Jon, Julia, Elizabeth, Kate and Carol (photo by Joan)

Elizabeth Bristow (checked shirt) coordinated this project. Joan Pillsbury and Carol Coan are seen in the upper left photo. Julia Johnson and Kate Mason also participated.



Brief News and links about Natural Organic Reduction (NOR)

Colorado: “Gov. Jared Polis signed a bill that legalizes human composting on May 10. Colorado is now the second state in the country, behind Washington, to offer this alternative burial process.” (CBS Denver.)

Washington: NOR was signed into law in May 2019, effective in 2020. Two NOR providers have began human composting there. Herland Forest: <http://www.herlandforest.org/natural-organic-reduction-is-here/>
Recompose: <https://recompose.life/> “Become soil when you die.”



Please make checks payable to **FCAWM** and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302.
Or donate ONLINE by credit card or e-check: www.funeralconsumerswmass.org/donate.html

Your contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501c3 organization.

___ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements: funeral or memorial services, care of the body and disposition of human remains (including burial, cremation or donation). I'm enclosing my voluntary contribution of

___\$15 ___\$30 ___\$50 ___\$100 or \$_____

___ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$_____

___ Please send me ___ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I enclose a donation of \$ _____ to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the 30-page, spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

___ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: _____ **Telephone:** _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____ **Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes No**

✂----- cut here -----

YOUR donations are important, enabling us to help people in need:

- A social worker at a Senior Center needed help resolving, for a client family, a dispute about a preneed plan that seemed to have gone awry. "Thank you, I feel that I've learned so much from this!"
- An elderly woman without computer access needed a print copy of our 2020 Price Comparison report, which we promptly mailed to her.
- A woman needed help resolving a dispute with a cemetery about a relative's crypt.
- A man asked questions about cremation and burial in preparation for discussion with his executor.
- A Covid-19 contact tracer sought help for a young woman who had just lost her father.
- "My husband passed away totally unexpectedly Saturday." ... "Thank you for your time."
- A distraught daughter complained of a funeral home calling to insist on payment; they already had her mother's body (from a nursing home). No one had informed the daughter of the death.
- A man whose friend was in hospice alerted us that "his wife is in need to talking to someone urgently to understand the details of the funeral process." The man thanked us for our prompt response and reported that the funeral home did a great job when the death occurred (four days after his call to us).

These are just a sample of the people that we have helped in recent months.

Thank you for supporting this important work!



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Save this date for our next Annual Meeting & Program:

Sunday October 17, 2021, 2-4 pm

Traditions Old & New: A Range of Rituals

We plan this as a “virtual” meeting, so you may attend from your home or wherever you have good internet access. We will announce more details in our Fall newsletter and on our website.

We have invited **Gail Rubin**, an award-winning speaker, end-of-life planning advocate, and author of *A Good Goodbye: Funeral Planning for Those Who Don't Plan to Die*. She will join us remotely. She is preparing for her 5th annual “Before I Die” New Mexico Festival (BeforeIDieNM.com), October 30 to November 2, 2021. For more about Gail, you may visit AGoodGoodbye.com.

NOTE: Please notify us if you change your address, wish to unsubscribe, or wish to change your preference (electronic vs. print) for our newsletters (2 per year). Call 413-376-4747 or send email to fcawmass@gmail.com. THANK YOU!