



Office of the Attorney General Consumer Alert — Survey of Funeral Costs

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Funerals can be surprisingly expensive. Many people will pay close to \$9,000 for funeral and burial costs. It can be hard to make wise financial choices when you are dealing with the death of a loved one, so it helps to do some research before you have the need for these services. If you decide to hold a funeral in a funeral home, you have many choices within the District of Columbia. There are 38 licensed funeral homes in the District.

Although price will certainly not be your only consideration, purchasing funeral services is a major financial decision, and you should approach the transaction aware of your rights and your options. If you are shopping after the death of a loved one, it may be helpful to involve a close friend or relative to help you do research and make decisions.

Prices for funeral services can vary greatly, as shown by the results below from a survey of District funeral homes conducted by the Office of the Attorney General in August 2017. This report on just some of the items on a General Price List will give you a sense of the range of prices that funeral homes charge. Below you will see both the range of prices charged by District funeral homes on select items, as well as the average (median) price for those items.

Basic Services Fee

This fee covers services that are common to all arrangements, as well as the funeral home's overhead costs. However, there can be differences between funeral homes in what, exactly, is covered by the fee. For instance, some homes include the cost of obtaining a death certificate in this fee, while others do not.

Range: \$965 - \$9,200

Average: \$2125

Embalming

Embalming is the replacement of fluids in the body with chemicals. If you are having a direct cremation or immediate burial, you do not need to pay for embalming. Also, in the District of Columbia, a funeral home cannot perform embalming services without specific written authorization from the deceased's next of kin, except in case of emergency.

Range: \$375 - \$995

Average: \$750



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Caskets

Some funeral homes include the Casket Price List on their General Price List; others just include the range of prices on the General Price List and have a separate Casket Price List. You do not have to buy a casket from the funeral home. Online vendors such as Amazon, Walmart and Costco sell caskets. A funeral home cannot charge you a fee for bringing in a casket. They also are prohibited by law from criticizing the quality of caskets available from outside vendors.

The General Price List Should Contain Both the Lowest and Highest Prices for Caskets

Low Range: \$350 - \$1,500
High Range: \$5,795 - \$125,000

Outer Burial Containers

Burial vaults and grave liners are containers that enclose a casket in a grave. Although District of Columbia law does not require you to use an outer burial container, if you choose a burial, the cemetery may require one because they help to prevent the grave from sinking deeper into the ground. You can purchase an outer burial container from the funeral home, the cemetery, or from an online vendor. The funeral home should supply you with an Outer Burial Container Price List before they show you any of the containers, unless they include the prices for each outer burial container on the General Price List.

The General Price List Should Contain Both the Lowest and Highest Prices for OBC's

Low Range: \$200 - \$1,275
High Range: \$1,280 - \$20,500

Direct Cremation

A direct cremation occurs without any formal viewing of the body or any visitation or viewing with the body. The funeral home should provide you with an "alternative container," such as a fiberboard container or unfinished wood box for a direct cremation.

Some funeral homes charge more for larger bodies. The prices below do not reflect this addition.

Range: \$700 - \$6,800
Average: \$1,945

Viewing/Visitation

The funeral home may offer viewing or visitation as part of a package. However, if you are not choosing a package, or want additional viewing time, this will add to your costs. Be careful when comparing prices. Some funeral homes list a price in their General Price List that is hourly; others list a price per day. For instance, one home charges \$225 per hour. Another charges \$150 per day.

Average Daily Charges: \$450

This range of prices shows that you can end up spending many thousands of dollars more for a funeral, depending upon the choices that you make. It is not illegal for a funeral home to charge higher prices, but knowing the options that you have should help you to make decisions that fit both your needs and your budget.



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What Should I Do If I Believe a Funeral Home is Violating the Law?

File a complaint with the District of Columbia Attorney General's Office of Consumer Protection by:

- ◆ calling our hotline at (202) 442-9828,
- ◆ emailing consumer.protection@dc.gov,
- ◆ filing a complaint online at <https://oag.dc.gov>, or
- ◆ writing to us at:

Office of Consumer Protection
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