

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
REGARDING PUBLIC BURIALS

The New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) will hold a public hearing to provide the public an opportunity to comment on and make recommendations regarding changes to the laws, rules, regulations, policies and procedures related to public burial. Testimony is welcome on any topic related to public burial, including but not limited to the topics listed in Appendix A to this Notice.

Background

The City of New York buries the remains of approximately 1,000-1,200 New York City residents at Hart Island each year. Most are individuals who have a next of kin who opted for a public burial, but some are unidentified or do not have a next of kin.

Available burial space is limited and in approximately 8 to 10 years, Hart Island will reach its maximum capacity. Hart Island is currently operated by the Department of Correction (DOC), which maintains the Island and manages burials. The Department also facilitates visits for those who have a loved one buried on the island. Visits for loved ones are afforded bimonthly and the public is given a monthly opportunity to visit the island regardless of their connection to a decedent. A work detail comprised of incarcerated individuals works on the island five days and, due to their presence, the Department must adhere to strict security protocols which limits the public's ability to access the Island.

The City is seeking alternatives regarding disposition of indigent and unclaimed decedent remains. The New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) has issued a Request for Information (RFI), available at <http://a069-ppps.nyc.gov/PPPS/PPSPublicWebsite/Pages/RequestForEOI.aspx>, which will help begin to resolve how the City will continue to carry out this critical and solemn role, including through options such as burials at a different location (with the possibility of multiple new locations), cremation, some other potential solution, or some combination thereof.

In addition to issuing the RFI referenced above, DSS seeks input from the public on public burials via the hearing described in this notice.

Representatives from the following City agencies will attend the hearing: DSS, Health and Hospitals (H+H), Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Department of Correction (DOC), Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), and Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks).

When and where is the Hearing? DSS will hold the hearing on October 24th from 4:00PM until 6:30PM. The hearing will be held at 125 Worth Street, Second Floor Auditorium. Please enter on Lafayette Street.

How do I provide testimony? Anyone can provide testimony by:

- **Email.** You can email written testimony to eiscontracts@hra.nyc.gov.
- **Mail.** You can mail written testimony to:

**Attn: Anna-Kay Blackwood
Director of Contracts
Department of Social Services / Human Resources Administration
150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007**

- **Hearing.** You can testify at the public hearing. Anyone who wants to testify must sign up to speak at the beginning of the hearing. You can speak for up to five minutes.

Is there a deadline to submit written testimony? The deadline to submit written testimony is October 22, 2019.

What if I need assistance to participate in the Hearing? If you need a foreign language interpreter, a sign language interpreter, or a reasonable accommodation for a disability at the Hearing, please let us know. You can call us at (212) 331-4500, email us at eiscontracts@hra.nyc.gov or tell us by mail at:

**Attn: Anna-Kay Blackwood
Director of Contracts
Department of Social Services / Human Resources Administration
150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007**

You must tell us by October 15, 2019.

This location has the following accessibility option(s) available: This location is accessible to individuals using wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

Can I review the testimony provided in connection with this hearing? Yes, no later than January 15, 2020, DSS will post on its website a report summarizing and, where appropriate, responding to the testimony received at the hearing.

Appendix A

Members of the public are invited to provide testimony regarding any topic related to public burials in New York City, including but not limited to the following:

1. The process for identifying, finding and contacting next of kin or legally responsible relative when a deceased individual is identified for public burial;
2. Support for and communication with next of kin or legally responsible relative who choose to direct the disposition of the decedent's remains to public burial or seek assistance from the department of social services' burial programs, including what information is provided regarding public burial, burial assistance program and Hart Island;
3. Procedures for burial of indigent, unclaimed individuals and individuals wherein the next of kin or legally responsible relative directs disposition of the remains to public burial;
4. The department of social services' burial assistance program;
5. The feasibility of implementation of a cremation assistance program or providing cremation as an alternative to public burial;
6. The feasibility or potential feasibility of public burial in locations other than Hart Island, both inside and outside of the city;
7. Recommendations for promoting efficiency and accessibility to the public of existing and proposed programs in connection with public burial;
8. The plan for the future operation of Hart Island.
9. Recommendations for changes to the system allowing the public to find burial information on Hart Island, that takes into consideration the public interest in searching such information and in protecting personally identifying information and medical privacy.