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NY bill would require outreach to Jewish burial groups before disposing of unclaimed bodies

The legislation, modeled on a Kentucky law, “reaffirms New York’s commitment to accommodating religious practices and cultural traditions,” state senator Sam Sutton’s office told JNS.

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A hospital morgue in the Netherlands. Credit: P.J.L Laurens via Wikimedia Commons.

(Apr. 21, 2026 / JNS) New legislation in the New York State Senate would require hospitals, morgues and other institutions to contact Jewish burial organizations before disposing of certain unclaimed bodies.

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“The legislation was developed after we became aware of the Kentucky bill during discussions with some of our constituents,” Noam Abrahams, Sutton’s communications director, told JNS.

The measure specifies that the legislation would not override prior written directives from the deceased regarding organ donations.

Abrahams said the Kentucky legislation “served as a useful reference point as we explored how to approach this issue in New York. We certainly think it establishes an approach easily adapted to other states.” That law, signed by Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear on April 13, requires officials to consult with religious organizations willing to provide burial before deciding to cremate an unclaimed body, after efforts to locate next of kin.

“Besides the religious significance, the senator believes this bill reaffirms New York’s commitment to accommodating religious practices and cultural traditions, as well as promotes clearer guidelines and consistency for institutions responsible for handling human remains,” Abrahams told JNS.

“We hope this sensitivity will strengthen trust between our state’s communities of faith and public institutions,” he said. “We believe the bill may also reduce public costs associated with burial or cremation.”

Rabbi Shlomo Litvin, director of Chabad of the Bluegrass and a key figure behind the Kentucky legislation, called Sutton’s proposal “a living example” of the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

“One mitzvah in one place helps a Jew across the world,” he told JNS.

The New York bill has been referred to the Senate Health Committee.



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