



Dale County Coroner's Office

Indigent Final Disposition Policy

Policy & Procedures Guide

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish uniform procedures for the administration of indigent final disposition services in Dale County, Alabama. The policy is intended to provide a dignified, lawful, and cost-conscious means of final disposition for eligible decedents when there is no estate, insurance, prepaid arrangement, benefit, have **no financial means or legally responsible or available person** able to pay necessary final-disposition expenses.

The County's indigent final-disposition program ordinarily provides direct cremation as the least costly dignified means of final disposition, unless cremation is legally unavailable, religiously prohibited, a dispute prevents cremation, or the County Commission or its designee determines that another lawful disposition method is appropriate.

2. Legal Authority and Policy Limits

This policy is adopted pursuant to the County's authority and responsibility under Alabama law, including Ala. Code § 38-8-2, which addresses necessary burial expenses for persons dying with no estate and no relatives in the county with ability or estate adequate to pay those expenses. This policy also recognizes the right-of-disposition and authorizing-agent framework under Ala. Code § 34-13-11 and related funeral-service authorization provisions under Ala. Code § 34-13-12.

Approval under this policy authorizes County payment for covered indigent final-disposition services only. Approval does not, by itself, establish legal authority to cremate, bury, or otherwise dispose of human remains. The contracted funeral home or crematory shall obtain and maintain all legally

required authorizations, permits, certificates, and documentation before cremation, burial, interment, or other final disposition occurs.

Nothing in this policy creates an entitlement to any specific funeral home, crematory, cemetery, urn, container, marker, memorial service, ceremony, private location, or upgraded service. Services are limited to those approved in advance by the County under this policy and subject to budgetary availability, legal requirements, and County Commission direction.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- The Dale County Coroner's Office;
- The Dale County Commission and any authorized Commission designee;
- Contracted funeral homes, crematories, transport providers, and cemetery/interment providers;
- Applicants, family members, next of kin, authorizing agents, legal representatives, or other persons requesting indigent final-disposition assistance; and
- Eligible decedents for whom Dale County is asked to pay necessary final-disposition expenses.

4. Services Provided

For approved cases, Dale County may provide, at County expense and through a contracted or approved provider, the following limited services:

- **Transportation** of the decedent as necessary for lawful final disposition;
- Direct **cremation**, unless another lawful disposition method is approved or required;
- A basic **cremation container** or other legally required minimum container;
- Temporary custody and **transfer** of cremated remains as necessary for interment;
- **Interment** of cremated remains in the County-designated section of **Newton City Cemetery** or another County-approved location; and
- A **standardized marker** (typically 18" x 8") containing the decedent's name, date of birth, and date of death, if known and if space and costs allow. If full dates are unavailable or impractical, the marker may list the decedent's name and years of birth and death.

No upgrades, alternative locations, private ceremonies, funeral or memorial services, customized markers, special urns, obituary charges, flowers, visitation services, embalming, viewing, transportation for family convenience, or other additional services are included unless separately approved in writing, by the county commission, before the charge is incurred.

5. Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for County-paid indigent final-disposition services, all of the following conditions should be satisfied unless the County Commission or its designee approves a documented exception:

1. The **death occurred in Dale County**. If the death occurred outside Dale County, assistance may be considered only upon written approval by the County Commission or its designee after determining that no other county, agency, estate, benefit, insurance, prepaid arrangement, or responsible party is legally or practically responsible.
2. The decedent has **no estate or financial resources** sufficient to pay necessary final-disposition expenses.
3. No insurance policy, prepaid funeral plan, VA benefit, Social Security death benefit, bank account, cash, vehicle, real property, or other available resource is sufficient and reasonably available to pay necessary final-disposition expenses.
4. The decedent leaves **no relative with the ability or estate adequate** to pay necessary final-disposition expenses, and no other person has agreed or become legally obligated to pay those expenses.
5. No family member, authorizing agent, personal representative, or responsible party has already contracted privately with a funeral home or service provider for services outside the County program unless the County approved those charges in advance.
6. A completed application, acknowledgment form, and all requested supporting documentation have been submitted to the Coroner's Office or other designated County official.
7. The application has been approved by the Dale County Coroner for eligibility review and by the County Commission or its authorized designee for County payment.

The County may verify financial information, including estate assets, insurance, prepaid arrangements, bank accounts, benefits, vehicles, real property, and the availability of relatives or other responsible persons. The County may deny or suspend assistance when information is incomplete, inconsistent, false, or not reasonably verifiable.

6. Exclusions and Denial Grounds

The following circumstances may result in denial, suspension, or limitation of County assistance:

- The decedent has estate funds, insurance, a prepaid funeral plan, benefits, property, or other resources that can reasonably be used for final-disposition expenses;
- A relative in Dale County has ability or estate adequate to pay necessary final-disposition expenses;

- A family member, authorizing agent, personal representative, or other person has agreed to pay or has contracted for final-disposition services;
- The family requests burial, private cemetery placement, upgraded urns, embalming, viewing, memorial services, custom marker, private ceremonies, or other services outside the County program without prior written County approval;
- The applicant refuses to provide requested information or documentation;
- The applicant provides materially false, incomplete, or misleading information;
- There is an unresolved dispute about the right of disposition, cremation authorization, burial authorization, custody of remains, or interment location; or
- Legal requirements, budgetary constraints, public-health concerns, investigative needs, or operational needs prevent approval.

7. Application Process

- **Step One: Obtain Application.** The indigent final-disposition application may be provided by the Coroner's Office, the County Commission designee, or a contracted funeral home/crematory.
- **Step Two: Submit Required Information.** The applicant shall provide decedent information, applicant information, known family and next-of-kin information, authorizing-agent information, financial information, and supporting documentation requested by the County.
- **Step Three: Identify Legal Authority.** The applicant shall identify any person with legal authority to control disposition, including any authorizing agent, surviving spouse, adult children, parents, siblings, personal representative, or other legally authorized person.
- **Step Four: Coroner Review.** The Coroner reviews the application, confirms case information, evaluates eligibility, and determines whether the case is appropriate for County-paid indigent final-disposition services.
- **Step Five: Commission Designee Approval.** The application is forwarded to the County Commission's authorized representative for secondary approval and authorization of County payment.
- **Step Six: Provider Coordination.** After approval for County payment, the Coroner or designee coordinates with the contracted provider. The provider remains responsible for obtaining and retaining all legally required disposition authorizations, cremation authorizations, permits, and records.

- **Note: No Private Charges Without Approval.** The County is not responsible for charges incurred by a family member, applicant, funeral home, crematory, or other provider unless the charge was approved in writing before it was incurred.

8. Right of Disposition; Authorization; Disputes

The County shall require reasonable documentation of the person legally authorized to control disposition when such person is known and available. If an authorizing agent, surviving spouse, adult child, parent, sibling, personal representative, or other legally authorized person exists and is available, that person must sign the required authorization or acknowledgment forms unless legal authority exists to proceed without that person's consent.

If no legally authorized person can be located after reasonable efforts, or if the decedent is unclaimed, the Coroner, County Commission designee, and contracted provider shall document the basis for proceeding under applicable law and provider requirements before final disposition occurs.

If there is a dispute among next of kin, authorizing agents, family members, or other persons regarding cremation, burial, custody, or interment, the County may suspend action until the dispute is resolved by written agreement, court order, or other lawful authorization. The County shall not be responsible for costs incurred because of a private dispute unless approved in advance in writing.

Where cremation is legally unavailable, religiously prohibited, or objected to by a legally authorized person, the County Commission or its designee may approve another lawful, dignified, and cost-conscious disposition method or may require the objecting party to assume responsibility for any costs exceeding the County-approved indigent service amount.

9. Procedures After Approval

9.1 Transportation

Transportation is limited to movement reasonably required for lawful final disposition and interment. Transportation may include removal from a hospital, residence, public location, medical examiner facility, funeral home, crematory, or cemetery when approved by the Coroner or designee. Transportation for family convenience or private services is not covered unless approved in advance.

9.2 Cremation or Other Final Disposition

Direct cremation shall be performed only by a licensed crematory or licensed funeral establishment operating under contract with, or approval by, Dale County. The provider shall comply with Alabama law, Board of Funeral Service requirements, industry standards, and all required authorization, identification, and chain-of-custody procedures.

9.3 Interment

Unless otherwise approved, cremated remains shall be interred in the County-designated section of Newton City Cemetery. Interment will be scheduled by the Coroner's Office or designee. The County

will make reasonable efforts to notify the applicant of the scheduled interment date and time, but failure to reach the applicant or family shall not delay interment once lawful authority for disposition has been obtained.

9.4 Marker

A standardized marker may be installed as part of the County program. Marker style, size, wording, and placement are standardized and cannot be customized. The County may limit marker information based on cost, space, available information, cemetery rules, and provider requirements.

10. Family Rights and Limitations

Family members or applicants may:

- Submit an application for indigent final-disposition assistance;
- Provide documentation of eligibility, next-of-kin status, and disposition authority;
- Attend interment if scheduling and operational needs permit;
- Request copies of death certificates through the appropriate vital-records process, subject to any applicable fees; and
- Choose private services at their own expense, provided the County has not already incurred costs and the private arrangement complies with law.

Family members or applicants may not, at County expense:

- Require burial instead of direct cremation unless cremation is legally unavailable, religiously prohibited, or otherwise approved by the County;
- Select a different cemetery or private interment location;
- Upgrade urns, containers, markers, ceremonies, viewings, transportation, or services;
- Direct a provider to incur charges not approved in writing by the County; or
- Remove cremated remains from the County cemetery after interment without lawful authorization and payment of all associated costs.

11. Responsibilities

11.1 Coroner's Office

- Receive and review applications;
- Document decedent information, place of death, next-of-kin information, and eligibility factors;

- Coordinate with the County Commission designee;
- Coordinate approved transportation, provider services, and interment;
- Maintain records of applications, approvals, denials, correspondence, provider invoices, disposition records, and interments; and
- Document reasonable efforts to locate next of kin or a legally authorized person when applicable.

11.2 County Commission or Commission Designee

- Provide secondary approval for County payment;
- Ensure compliance with County policy, budgetary limits, and procurement requirements;
- Approve or deny exceptions;
- Oversee contracted service providers and approved rates; and
- Review the policy annually with the Coroner.

11.3 Contracted Funeral Home / Crematory / Provider

- Provide only those services approved by the County;
- Obtain and maintain all legally required authorizations, permits, certificates, cremation approvals, identification records, and chain-of-custody documentation;
- Perform transportation, cremation, delivery of cremated remains, and related services in accordance with law and contract;
- Submit invoices and documentation required by the County; and
- Notify the Coroner or designee before incurring charges outside the approved scope.

12. Reimbursement and Recovery

If, after approval or payment, the County discovers estate funds, insurance proceeds, prepaid funeral benefits, VA benefits, Social Security benefits, bank accounts, property, or other resources available for final-disposition expenses, the County reserves the right to seek reimbursement to the extent permitted by law.

The County may require the applicant to assign or remit available benefits intended for final-disposition expenses and may deny future requests or seek recovery where materially false or incomplete information was provided.

13. Recordkeeping; Privacy; Public Records

The Coroner's Office shall maintain applications, acknowledgment forms, approval forms, denial forms, financial verification documents, provider invoices, correspondence, interment records, and disposition records in accordance with applicable Alabama records-retention requirements.

Records may contain sensitive personal, financial, medical, investigative, or family information. Confidential, protected, or sensitive information shall be handled and redacted as required or permitted by Alabama law before disclosure. The County's maintenance of records under this policy does not waive any applicable privilege, confidentiality protection, law-enforcement/investigative exemption, medical privacy protection, or other legal protection.

14. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the Dale County Coroner and the Dale County Commission or its designee. Revisions may be made to address changes in Alabama law, provider requirements, cemetery rules, budgetary requirements, operational needs, or County Commission direction.



Dale County Coroner's Office
Indigent Cremation Services Application

SECTION 1 — DECEDENT INFORMATION

Full Name of Decedent: _____

Date of Birth: _____ **Date of Death:** _____

Place of Death: ☐ Hospital ☐ Residence ☐ Public Location ☐ Other: _____

Address at Time of Death: _____

Was the decedent a resident of Dale County? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, explain: _____

SECTION 2 — APPLICANT INFORMATION (Next of Kin or Responsible Party)

Full Name: _____

Relationship to Decedent: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ **Email:** _____

Are you willing and able to assume financial responsibility for cremation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If No, explain financial hardship: _____

Section 3 — Known Disposition Authority / Next of Kin

Identify any person known to have legal authority to control final disposition, including any authorizing agent, spouse, adult children, parents, siblings, personal representative, or other legally authorized person.

Name	Relationship / Authority	Phone / Email	Able to Assist?	Objects to Cremation?

Has any family member agreed to take responsibility for final arrangements?

☐ Yes ☐ No. If Yes, list name: _____

Section 4 — Financial Information

Did the decedent have any of the following? Attach documentation if available.

Asset / Resource	Yes	No	Details / Amount / Location
Life insurance	☐	☐	
Bank account(s)	☐	☐	
Cash on hand	☐	☐	
Real property	☐	☐	
Vehicle(s)	☐	☐	
Prepaid funeral plan	☐	☐	
VA benefits	☐	☐	
Social Security death benefit	☐	☐	
Other benefits or assets	☐	☐	

Total estimated assets available for final-disposition expenses \$: _____

Section 5 — Program Acknowledgment and Certification

By signing below, I acknowledge and certify that:

July 28, 2026

- Dale County's program ordinarily provides direct cremation only, unless another lawful disposition method is approved or required.
- Cremated remains will ordinarily be interred in the County-designated section of Newton City Cemetery.
- A standardized marker may be provided and cannot be customized.
- No upgrades, alternative locations, private ceremonies, memorial services, embalming, viewings, custom markers, or additional services are included unless approved in writing in advance.
- Approval of County payment does not itself establish legal authority to cremate or otherwise dispose of remains. Required legal authorizations must be obtained before final disposition.
- All information provided is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.
- Providing false, incomplete, or misleading information may result in denial of assistance and/or County efforts to seek reimbursement.
- If assets, insurance, benefits, or other resources later become available for final-disposition expenses, Dale County may seek reimbursement to the extent permitted by law.

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____

SECTION 6 — CORONER REVIEW (Office Use Only)

Application Received Date: _____

Reviewed By (Coroner): _____

☐ Approved ☐ Denied **Reason if Denied:** _____

Coroner Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

SECTION 7 — COMMISSION DESIGNEE APPROVAL (Office Use Only)

☐ Approved ☐ Denied

Comments: _____

Commission Designee Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

SECTION 8 — FINAL DISPOSITION RECORD (Office Use Only)

Cremation Provider: _____

Date of Cremation: _____

Interment Date: _____

Marker Installed: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Notes:



Dale County Coroner's Office

Indigent Cremation Services Policy Acknowledgment Form

Section 1 — Decedent Information

Full Name of Decedent: _____

Date of Death: _____

Section 2 — Applicant Information

Applicant Name: _____

Relationship to Decedent: _____

Phone Number: _____ Address: _____

Section 3 — Policy Acknowledgment

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the Dale County Coroner's Office Indigent Final Disposition Services Policy & Procedures. I understand and agree to the following:

1. **County-Paid Services Are Limited.** Dale County provides only those services approved under the indigent final-disposition program. The ordinary County-paid method is direct cremation, unless another lawful disposition method is approved or required.
2. **Interment Location.** Cremated remains will ordinarily be interred in the County-designated section of Newton City Cemetery. No alternative cemetery or private location is available at County expense unless approved in writing.
3. **Provided Items.** The County-paid program may include necessary transportation, direct cremation, a basic container, interment in the designated cemetery section, and a standardized marker.
4. **No Upgrades or Additional Services.** The program does not include burial, urn upgrades, embalming, viewing, private ceremonies, memorial services, custom markers, alternative interment locations, flowers, obituary charges, or other additional services unless approved in writing before the charge is incurred.
5. **Eligibility Requirements.** Approval is based on financial need, absence of estate resources, absence of available benefits or insurance, and absence of relatives or responsible persons able to pay necessary final-disposition expenses.

6. Verification. The County may verify financial information, including assets, insurance, benefits, prepaid arrangements, estate resources, and family resources relevant to eligibility.
7. Legal Authorization Required. Approval for County payment does not itself authorize cremation or other final disposition. Required legal authorizations must be obtained from the legally authorized person or otherwise documented under applicable law.
8. Disputes. If there is a dispute regarding cremation, burial, custody, interment, or right of disposition, the County may suspend action until the dispute is resolved by agreement, court order, or other lawful authorization.
9. Removal of Remains. Removal of cremated remains from the County cemetery after interment requires lawful authorization and payment of all associated costs.
10. Final Decision Authority. Approval of indigent final-disposition services requires review by the Dale County Coroner and approval for County payment by the Dale County Commission or its authorized designee.

Section 4 — Applicant Certification

I certify that I understand the policies listed above, that I will comply with all requirements of the Dale County Indigent Final Disposition Services Program, and that all information I have provided is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Section 5 — Coroner / Office Use Only

Policy Acknowledgment Received By: _____

Date Received: _____

FORM C

Dale County Coroner's Office

Provider Certification and Invoice Checklist

This checklist is intended for use by contracted or approved providers before submitting an invoice for County payment.

- ☐ Provider performed only services approved in writing by the County.
- ☐ Provider obtained and retained all legally required disposition and/or cremation authorizations.
- ☐ Provider confirmed decedent identification before final disposition.
- ☐ Provider complied with Alabama law, Board of Funeral Service requirements, and provider licensing requirements.
- ☐ Provider submitted itemized invoice matching the County-approved rate or service authorization.
- ☐ Provider documented date of cremation or other final disposition.
- ☐ Provider documented delivery or transfer of cremated remains for interment.
- ☐ Provider notified Coroner or designee of any unusual circumstance, dispute, objection, or delay.

Provider Name: _____

Decedent Name: _____

Provider Representative Signature:

Date: _____

Invoice Amount \$: _____

Appendix A

Legal Authority Reference Sheet

This appendix is for internal reference and should be reviewed by the County Attorney before adoption or amendment.

Ala. Code § 38-8-2

Addresses necessary burial expenses for a person dying with no estate and leaving no relatives in the county with ability or estate adequate to defray those expenses, making such necessary expenses a charge upon the county in which the death takes place.

Ala. Code § 34-13-11

Addresses authorizing agents and the right of disposition, including who may control the location, manner, and conditions of disposition of deceased human remains.

Ala. Code § 34-13-12

Addresses reliance on funeral-service agreements and/or disposition authorization, and should be considered by the contracted provider when determining whether it has sufficient authority to proceed.

Drafting Notes

- Do not cite Ala. Code § 45-37-60 in the Dale County policy unless counsel determines that section applies; it appears to be a Jefferson County local-law provision.
- Use “indigent final disposition” rather than “indigent cremation” to preserve flexibility, while still making direct cremation the ordinary County-paid method.
- Keep County payment approval separate from legal authorization to cremate or otherwise dispose of remains.
- Review provider contracts, cemetery agreements, Board of Funeral Service requirements, and County procurement policies before final adoption.