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## Local funeral director found guilty of abuse of a corpse

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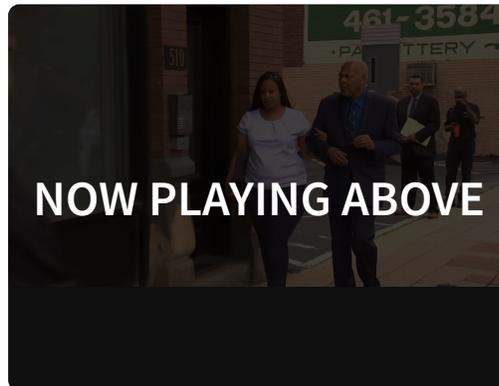
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LOCAL

# Local funeral director found guilty of abuse of a corpse



Local funeral director found guilty of abuse of a corpse



By **Liz Kilmer, WPXI-TV**

March 20, 2024 at 6:57 pm

EDT



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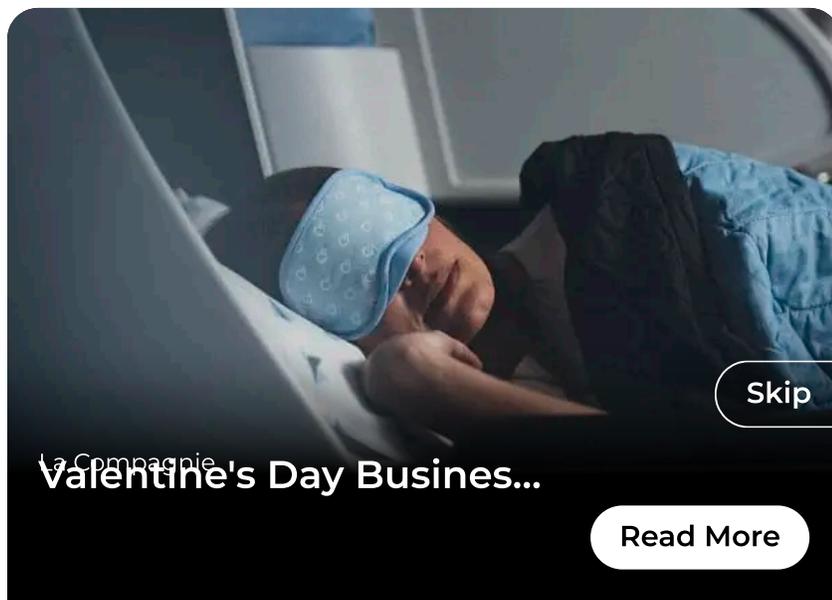
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MUNHALL, Pa. — A local funeral home director was found guilty of abuse of a corpse on Wednesday.

The verdict, issued by Allegheny County Common Pleas Judge Beth Lazzara, came following three days of testimony in the case of Michael Aldrich.

Channel 11 has covered Aldrich's case since 2022, when the 76-year-old funeral director was first charged.

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A criminal complaint initially alleged that Aldrich, of West Funeral Home, had left the body of Dexter Owens to decay unrefrigerated for eight days. An attorney representing the Owens family claims that Aldrich did so deliberately, after the family expressed concerns over the cremation costs, and indicated their intention of switching funeral homes.

Pennsylvania law requires a body “to be embalmed, placed in a sealed casket, or refrigerated if final disposition (burial or cremation) does not occur within 24 hours,” per code.

“The judge recognized that funeral directors are entrusted by the public. They have a very sacred obligation to treat the remains of a loved one with respect. That didn’t happen in this case. The guilty verdict is appropriate,” said Attorney Paul Ellis, now representing the Owens family in a civil case.

Ellis was present in the courtroom as the judge read her verdict, seated alongside Dexter’s brother, Kelvin Owens.

Owens told Channel 11 that the decision “brings a lot of peace.”

Aldrich declined to comment following the verdict, but his defense attorney, Bill Difenderfer, called the outcome “unconscionable.”

Difenderfer presented a different series of events to Channel 11, stating that the body had been sent to a crematory, which was awaiting authorization from the medical examiner.

“[The Owens] find a cheaper funeral home to do it days later, and ask for the body back, which of course has decomposed, not with us, at the crematory, and it was refrigerated, by the way, and the victims never even see the body,” Difenderfer said. “In 40 years, I’ve never had a worse verdict.”

Ellis, however, told Channel 11 that PA law states that “if you’re the funeral director in charge, you’re responsible no matter where that body goes and no matter who’s handling it.”

Difenderfer told Channel 11 that his client has no prior criminal record and is an upstanding citizen.

“I guess now for all funeral homes and directors, beware that if you don’t refrigerate a body within 24 hours, like 27 hours, 28 hours, you could become a criminal and have a criminal record for abuse of corpse, which is absolutely ridiculous. That’s not the purpose of the statute. I disagree with every bit of the ruling.

Judge Lazzara acknowledged that this is not the typical circumstance wherein an individual is charged with an abuse of corpse misdemeanor. Nonetheless, she stated that the charge applies based on the facts of the case.

Difenderfer stated that he hopes his client has the resources to appeal.

Meanwhile, Owens told Channel 11 that he wants to ensure this situation doesn’t happen to anyone else. He’s been holding onto his beloved brother’s ashes, and plans to spread

them soon.

“Dexter was well-liked by everybody. He was an avid fisherman and I’ve been waiting a long time for this case to be over with so my sister and I, we can all take him up to Punxsutawney and release him, because that’s where he liked to fish.”

Aldrich is scheduled to be sentenced next month. He is not expected to face jail time based on the charge.

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