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### State agencies to alter pre-need funeral accounts

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BY PATSY R. BRUMFIELD  
Daily Journal

Four Northeast Mississippi funeral homes have been sued about their pre-need funeral trust accounts, the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office said Thursday.

Accused of being deficient in their pre-need trust accounts are Prentiss Memorial Gardens in Baldwyn; Liberty Memorial Park in Booneville; Pinecrest Memorial Park in Pittsboro; and Jackson Mortuary in Aberdeen.

The Attorney General's Office also is involved in the legal action.

According to Mississippi law, a funeral home provider who sells a "pre-need" funeral plan that is not funded by insurance must put at least 85 percent of pre-need funds in a trust account to cover the future expenses of burial.

"Misapplying trust funds from someone's funeral arrangements is literally grave-robbing," said Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann.

Prentiss Memorial, Liberty Memorial, Pinecrest Memorial and Sunset Gardens Memorial Park in Laurel were opened and operated by Don Middleton and Rogers Memorial Management Co. LLC. Hosemann's office said based on incomplete records, \$378,960.03 worth of contracts were sold by the funeral providers. Examiners reportedly found at least 50 percent of those funds are unaccounted for.

The secretary of state and attorney general's offices have sued Middleton and Rogers Memorial Management in Prentiss County seeking restitution, repayment of attorney's fees and investigative costs, as well as civil penalties in the amount of \$1,000 per violation.

No one answered Daily Journal phone calls to the regional businesses.

Jackson Mortuary owner Russell E. Jackson Sr. said by telephone Thursday to call his daughter, co-owner Cynthia Jackson, today for an explanation.

Filed in Chancery Court of Monroe County, the state's complaint alleges \$10,000 in insurance premium payments by pre-need customers were not properly accounted for by Jackson Mortuary.

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