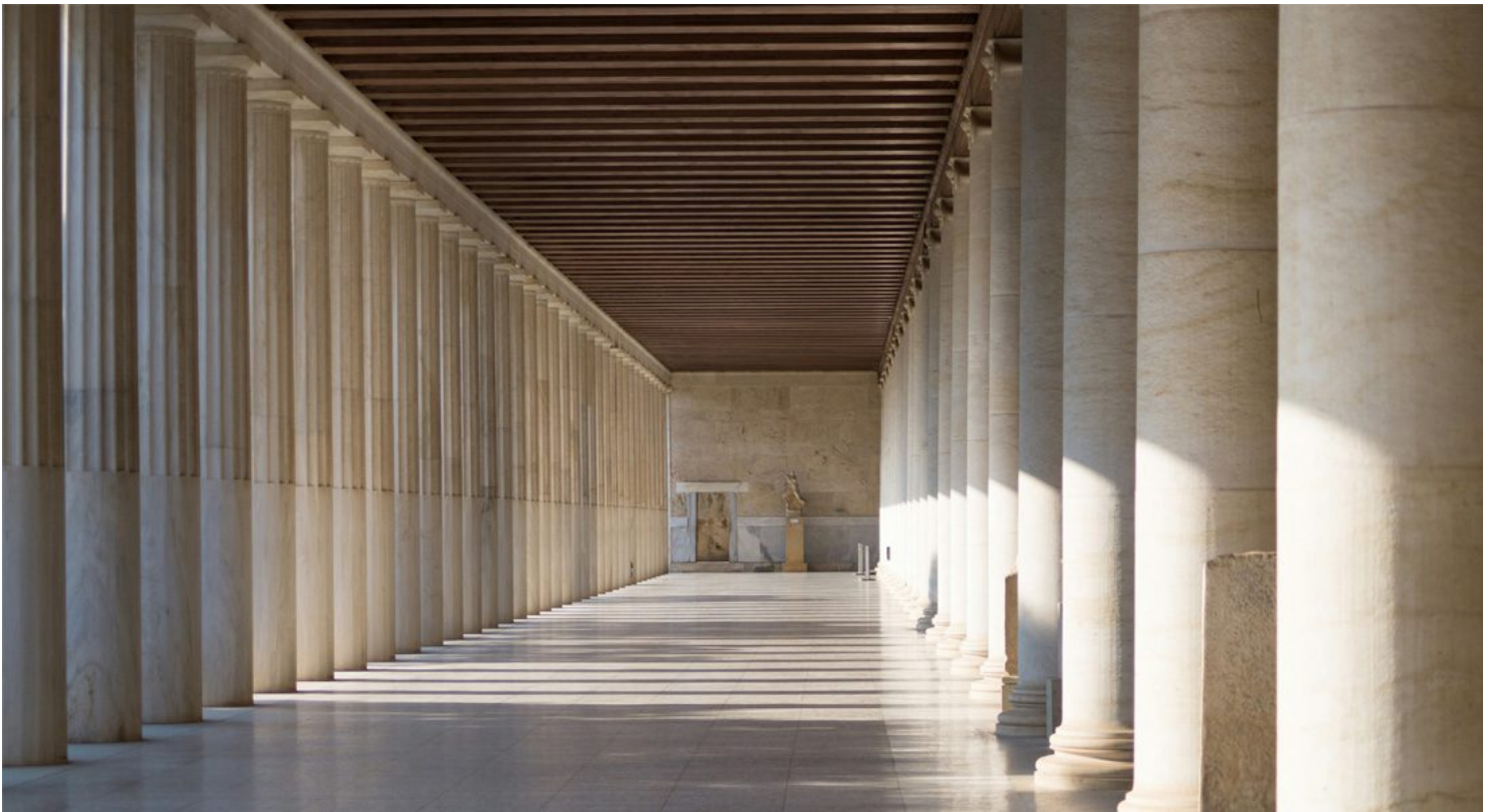


NEWS & INSIGHTS

Forensic pathologist's death calls to mind funeral home food ban

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When world-famous, Pittsburgh-based forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht [died on May 13](#), his obituaries printed around the country were littered with the famous names of people who were the subject of death investigations that he led, questioned or participated in.

Anna Nicole Smith. JonBenet Ramsey. John F. Kennedy.

But to Pennsylvania funeral directors, Wecht was a friend who fought to update outdated rules and laws.

The former Allegheny County Commissioner and Coroner went to bat for the state's funeral homes in questioning the constitutionality of the Pennsylvania Funeral Director Law. In particular, when a federal court in 2012 struck down part of the director law that prohibited food in a funeral home, the [court decision directly cited Wecht's expert witness testimony](#) as a reason to remove the ban.

Funeral directors had argued for years that the food ban portion of the law was unfair and antiquated. Every other state now allows food in funeral homes.

While a higher court would later overturn the changes in the Pa. Funeral Director Law, Wecht's testimony in the case – where he said “I find no medical or scientific merit in the argument that serving food at a funeral home would constitute a potential public health risk” – is still cited by funeral directors looking to rid themselves of the law's food ban.

And the Pennsylvania Board of Funeral Directors may be listening. The board in 2019 [dropped the food ban in a statement of policy](#). However, that statement of policy was never formally published and the ban remains in the law.

But at recent board meetings, the discussion has been renewed, and there has been some support for finally ending the food ban by formally publishing the policy. If the board publishes the policy, funeral directors in Pennsylvania would be allowed to serve food in certain areas of their funeral homes.

It all depends on the board however, for how and when – or if – the policy will be formally adopted. If you have any questions about the food ban in funeral homes and where it stands, [please contact me](#) at any time.

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