



## **American Citizen Waits in a Port-au-Prince Morgue to Come Home A plea to extend the provisions of the 1935 Repatriation Assistance Program**

Just a few days shy of the New Year, Pierre Marie Bourdeau, an American citizen visiting, Haiti was murdered by thugs seeking to carjack the car he was driving.

His family back in Chicago learned of his death through a telephone call. They had to absorb the shock of his tragic loss, while simultaneously learning that they would have no assistance from the American Embassy in Haiti, nor any other government mission (American or Haitian) to repatriate his remains back to the United States.



For families of citizens who die suddenly while out of the United States, this combination is devastating both emotionally, and financially. There are currently no provisions in place by governments, or humanitarian organizations to assist families who find themselves in this situation.

*According to the National Association of Funeral Directors' website: "Costs for preparation and shipment of the remains are high because of embalming fees and air freight costs. Charges for these services vary widely depending on the geographic location and facilities available. Preparation and shipment of the remains must be carried out in accordance with local laws, regulations, and customs. Embalming in most foreign countries is not widely practiced and cosmetic embalming that meets U.S. standards is rare. Although there are methods to prepare the body for shipment, it is important to remember that this preparation will normally not render the remains suitable for viewing...."*

For Pierre Marie Bourdeau's family and others like them, this predicament means coming up with thousands of dollars in a matter of a few short days. As stated by the National

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Association of Funeral Directors, the costs are high, and as well cannot be regulated because of the number of variables involved in preparation and shipment of remains.

This tragic situation has played out all over the world and the **Haitian Priorities Project** wants to work to change this lack of a safety net.

The United States government created the Repatriation Assistance Program in 1935 to assist US citizens who found themselves ill or destitute in a foreign country, and needed assistance in returning home to the United States. In addition, it provided assistance for those needing help getting on their feet once returned to the US. Although, the citizen has to pay the assistance back, the Program provides a buffer zone for which individuals can be insulated from the devastating effects of being completely without resources.

As described on the website of the US Department of Health and Human Services, *The United States (U.S.) Repatriation Program was established by Title XI, Section 1113 of the Social Security Act (Assistance for U.S. Citizens Returned from Foreign Countries) to provide temporary assistance to U.S. citizens and their dependents who have been identified by the Department of State (DOS) as having returned, or been brought from a foreign country to the U.S. because of destitution, illness, war, threat of war, or a similar crisis ([http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title11/1113.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title11/1113.htm)).*

*Temporary assistance is defined as money payments, medical care, temporary billeting, transportation, and other goods and services necessary for the health or welfare of individuals (including guidance, counseling, and other welfare services), furnished to United States (U.S.) citizens and their dependents who are without available resources in the U.S. upon their arrival from abroad and for such period after their arrival, not exceeding 90 days as may be provided in regulations of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). Certain temporary assistance may be furnished beyond the 90 day period in the case of any citizen or dependent upon a finding by the HHS Secretary that the circumstances involved necessitate or justify the furnishing of such assistance beyond such period in that particular case (42 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1313).*

On behalf of families needing assistance when faced with the death of a loved one outside the borders of the US, the Haitian Priorities Project is embarking on a campaign to have the Repatriation Assistance Program extended to include assistance for the repatriation of remains of US citizens.

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Pierre Marie Bourdeau was a resident of the state of Illinois, and therefore HPP first appeals to Senator's Richard Durbin and Barack Obama, and to Representative Jan Schakowsky to help with the repatriation of Mr. Bourdeau's remains. In addition, we seek to submit an amendment to the 1935 Repatriation Assistance Program to include a provision for the repatriation of US citizens' remains without having to repay the government for the assistance.

American Embassies in any country should be equipped to assist US families in this predicament in a financial capacity. The embassy is the first point of contact for families with loved ones who have died in the country in which the embassy resides.

The extension of the government's Repatriation Program, if properly funded and implemented, would represent the compassion and humanitarianism that the United States has become known for throughout the world.

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