

SB1028

**Human Remains - Alkaline Hydrolysis and Natural Organic Reduction
(Green Death Care Options Act)**

Testimony before the Education, Energy, and the Environment

Hearing March 5, 2024

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the committee, my name is Peter Alexander, and I am providing written testimony today **in support of SB1028**. I appreciate the leadership of Senator Waldstreicher in sponsoring this legislation.

I've been troubled for some time about current funeral practices in the U.S. Cemetery burials are costly affairs that occupy increasingly valuable land while cremation generates greenhouse gases and other pollutants from an energy-intensive process. Now, "green" burials are available in several states. Seven, including Washington, Colorado, Oregon, California, Vermont, and New York allow Natural Organic Reduction and 20 states allow Alkaline Hydrolysis (also known as "water cremation" or "aquamation"). I would like Maryland to add these green burial options to existing Maryland law.

Natural Organic Reduction gently transforms human remains into soil. The resulting soil is safe to be scattered in ornamental gardens and conservation forests although health regulations prohibit their use in gardens used to grow food. Alkaline hydrolysis is another reduction process in which water, alkaline chemicals, and heat are used to accelerate decomposition. The ash from the process is handled like cremation ash and the resulting liquid effluent, which 95% water, is safe to discharge like any other wastewater. Each of these processes uses 90% less energy than regular cremation. There is a demand for green burials – surveys have shown that 64% of American express an interest in them.

SB1028 would amend current law by adding alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction as alternative funeral options for families. It would create regulations developed with help from the Maryland State Board of Morticians and Funeral Directors (BOMFD) and the Maryland Office of Cemetery Oversight (OCO). These two agencies would then administer the licensing of these programs in the same way that they currently regulate crematories. Maryland's funeral industry would be allowed to offer alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction as funeral options at facilities located anywhere in Maryland where local zoning would allow them.

Green burials are safe and environmentally friendly, and Maryland residents should have the option to choose a green burial.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

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