



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs

Protecting a consumer's right to a meaningful, dignified, and affordable funeral.

**House Committee on Health and Government Operations, Maryland General Assembly
Testimony on: HB1168 – Green Death Care Options Act**

Position: Support Hearing Date March 5, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony from the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs (FCAME) in support of House Bill 1168, which would legalize alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction (NOR) in Maryland.

Alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction are two relatively new methods for caring for the dead. The first, also referred to as “water cremation,” involves reducing the body to a small volume of pulverized bones - similar to the ashes produced by flame cremation - by using water, alkali, moderate heat, and agitation in a closed container for a number of hours. This process utilizes significantly less energy than conventional, or “flame” cremation. The body tissue is broken down into simple molecules and washed away leaving only bones that are then finely ground and returned to the family.

Natural organic reduction involves accelerated natural decomposition of the body in a closed container along with organic materials such as straw, wood chips, and alfalfa with careful control of temperature, humidity, and gas exchange. Over a matter of weeks, the body tissues are reduced to what amounts to an enriched compost. A small amount can be returned to the family and the rest can be used to nourish trees, gardens, or natural preserves. Again, very little energy is used as the process makes use of naturally occurring, somewhat accelerated, decomposition.

Both of these processes avoid committing the metal, cement, and synthetic materials that end up underground in traditional burials, as well as the toxic chemicals used in embalming. They use less energy than flame cremation and are better for the environment because they avoid the release of potentially toxic gases into the atmosphere. They are also more cost effective than traditional burials. Not everyone will opt for one of these. But many people are looking for more environmentally friendly options for after-death care as a result of increased awareness of the environmental costs of our traditional ways of doing things. Legalizing alkaline hydrolysis and natural organic reduction will provide more choices for Maryland residents, choices that are already available in growing numbers of other states.

FCAME is concerned with providing grieving families with individual and affordable choices that will allow them to do what they believe is best for their loved ones. We urge the committee to make a favorable report on this legislation.

Testimony submitted by Barbara Blaylock, President of FCAME, and the FCAME Board of Trustees

FCAME is the volunteer-run, regional chapter of the non-profit Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA), the oldest and largest consumer protection organization focused solely on guarding the rights (and wallets) of grieving consumers. FCA and its chapters take no money from the death care industry or government.

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