



HoCoClimateAction.org
Howard County, Maryland

HB1168

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

Testimony before the Health and Government Operations Committee

Hearing March 5, 2024

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Vice-Chair Cullison, and members of the committee, our names are Peter Alexander and Liz Feighner, and we represent the 750+ members of Indivisible Howard County and HoCo Climate Action, a 350.org local chapter and a grassroots organization representing approximately 1,400 subscribers, respectively. Both organizations are active members of the Maryland Legislative Coalition (with 30,000+ members). We are providing written testimony today **in support of SB1028**. We appreciate the leadership of Delegate Kaiser and many of her colleagues in sponsoring this legislation.

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, Nevada, 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. 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 is 95% water, is safe to discharge like any other wastewater after a pH adjustment. Each of these processes uses 80% less energy than regular cremation. There is a demand for green burials – surveys have shown that 64% of Americans express an interest in them.

HB1168 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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