

Testimony, 03/05/2024  
Matthew C. Bates,  
HB 1128 and SB 1068

My name is Matthew Bates. I am a retired journalist, professor of journalism, and a resident of Derwood, Maryland. Thank you for this opportunity to voice support for House Bill 1168 and Senate Bill 1028.

The debate over legalizing Alkaline Hydrolysis (or “water cremation”) and Natural Organic Reduction in Maryland really revolves around two issues: consumer choice and business opportunity.

I say this because the two techniques addressed in these bills are not new, untried, or untested. Quite the contrary.

Alkaline Hydrolysis – first legalized in Minnesota in 2003 – is now legal in 26 states, with Virginia poised to raise the number to 27.

Natural Organic Reduction – first legalized in Washington in 2017 – is now legal in 7 states, with Delaware poised to raise the number to 8.

Both techniques have been repeatedly vetted by legislators and regulators across the country. The underlying science and engineering are well-understood. We have years of operational experience proving these processes can be carried out without risk to the public health or to the environment.

There is a track record that anyone can examine and a substantial knowledge base to guide us, and the bills before you incorporate that knowledge and experience.

We also know there is strong consumer demand for “green” – or environmentally-friendly – death care options, and that people are building flourishing businesses in state after state to satisfy the demand.

According to a 2023 study by the National Funeral Directors Association, 60% of the U.S. public is interested in green death care options, and the numbers are steadily growing.

As one of the 60%, I'd like to explain why these options mean so much to me.

Like many of you, I have learned an important lesson about our relationship to the environment. It took many years, but I finally learned it.

I now understand we cannot continue to take, take, take from nature, then toss it all away however and wherever we wish without doing terrible damage of this world -- and to ourselves.

I try to live now guided by the understanding that I am part of this world, part of this magnificent creation, not separate from it.

I do not want my death to be an occasion for putting more greenhouse gasses into the air, or more chemicals, concrete, and steel into the ground.

I want my body returned as purely and completely as possible to the Earth that has given me all that I need, all that I love, and all that I am.

Natural Organic Reduction is how I choose to pay my final respects to my body and to this world, and I know many people who wish to do the same.

Please make the proven, safe death care options in these bills available to the people of Maryland.

Thank you.

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