



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs

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

HB 1060 – Support (with amendments)

Testimony for the House Committee on Health and Government Operations Of the Maryland General Assembly

March 8, 2023

Testimony by: Barbara Blaylock, FCAME President and Chris Palmer, FCAME Vice President

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony from the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs (FCAME) in support of House Bill 1060, which would legalize natural organic reduction (NOR). Like Alkaline hydrolysis, NOR can be considered a form of non-flame cremation. It is sometimes referred to as human composting.

FCAME is the local affiliate of the Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA). We are a nonprofit whose mission is to educate and advocate for consumers with regard to after death care. FCAME supports HB 1060 because it will give Marylanders more choices at the end of life. Although increasing numbers of cemeteries offer green burial options and one green burial preserve has recently opened near Baltimore, most Maryland residents have only two choices at hand for after-death care. The first is conventional burial (often accompanied by embalming), and the second is flame cremation. Both of these options have significant environmental impacts.

As concern about the environment has grown in recent years, interest in alternative and more eco-friendly methods of body disposition has grown, resulting in the development of alkaline hydrolysis and NOR. While NOR is not as “green” as green burial, it appears to have less environmental impact than flame cremation or conventional burial. It poses a reasonable option for those who might consider it more dignified to have their body rapidly turned into a nutrient-rich soil amendment under more controlled conditions than are achieved with burial.

NOR was first legalized in 2019 in Washington State, where alternatives to traditional burial and flame cremation are increasingly popular. There are several facilities there, each of which has developed slightly different but similar methods that achieve the same result. Recompose, one of those facilities, surrounds the dead body with alfalfa, wood chips, and straw in stainless steel capsules. The family can participate in a “laying-in” ceremony as the body is laid to rest and flowers, notes, and other biodegradable objects may be placed with it. The capsules are periodically rotated and temperatures are kept between 130°F and 160°F. Oxygen is pumped into the capsule and malodorous gases are removed via continual air exchange, and moisture content is monitored.

After four to seven weeks in the vessel at Recompose, the contents are removed, bones are pulverized (as is done with flame cremation) and medical implants removed and recycled when possible. The material is then allowed to cure for another two to six weeks. The result, after a total of eight to twelve weeks, is a cubic yard of what looks like a fine mulch that can be taken by the family in whole or in part, to be used on their own land or decorative (not vegetable) gardens, and/or to be kept in part in an urn. The rest can be donated to native restoration efforts at a 700 acre preserve at Bells Mountain in southern Washington state.

As of today, six states — Washington, Oregon, Vermont, Colorado, California, and New York have either legalized or set a date for legalizing human composting as a means of disposition after death. Legislation is pending in several other states. FCAME supports the legalization of NOR to give Maryland residents more choices for after-death care.

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