



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs

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

HB 0869 – Support with Amendment

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

March 7, 2023

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

Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chairwoman Cullison, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony from the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs (FCAME) in support of House Bill 0869, which would require the State Department of the Environment to conduct a study of the environmental and public health impacts of death care and funeral practices both in the State and in general.

FCAME supports HB 0869 because it will help Marylanders make wiser and more prudent decisions about death care at this time when the effects of climate change and environmental pollution are of increasing, and even dire, concern.

In most conventional burials, the body is pumped with toxic embalming fluid, placed in a steel or wooden casket, and buried within a concrete-lined vault six feet underground. This process consumes trees, steel, and cement; generates acres of lawns that are counterproductive to natural ecosystems; and utilizes toxic chemicals that expose funeral workers to occupational hazards and can leach into soil.

Flame cremation (as opposed to *water* cremation, or alkaline hydrolysis), an increasingly popular choice, is often considered more eco-friendly than conventional burial. But it entails heating the body to 1800 -1900 degrees by burning natural gas, releasing significant amounts of carbon dioxide as well as variable amounts of particulate matter and chemical air pollutants into the environment.

As concern about the environment has grown in recent years, interest in green burial, essentially a return to the simple methods used for centuries resulting in natural passive decomposition without significant environmental impact, particularly in natural preserve cemeteries, has also grown.

Recent innovations have introduced alkaline hydrolysis (resomation) and Natural Organic Reduction (NOR, sometimes called human composting), which are also billed as environmentally superior to traditional burial and flame cremation. The relative environmental benefits of each of these vs green burial are hotly debated. Leading proponents of green burial point out that the resources used for NOR, are not negligible. Both NOR and alkaline hydrolysis also require construction of special facilities, and some degree of mechanical processing and heating, though not to the temperatures required for flame cremation.

The Maryland Department of the Environment confirms that definitive unbiased studies comparing the total carbon footprints and pollution impacts of all the current options for body disposition have not been done.

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Maryland and Environs strongly encourages this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 0869, amended to stipulate sharing the results with the public by releasing a summary of the results to the media and posting them on the Department of Health website and elsewhere. This would provide Maryland residents with the information required to make the most environmentally responsible choices among death care options .

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