

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5354

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING TERRAMATION.

Vote Date: 3/15/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/8/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee
Rep. Christine Palm, 36th Dist.
Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, 18th Dist.
Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.
Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.
Rep. Keith Denning, 42nd Dist.
Sen. Ceci Maher, 26th Dist.
Rep. Corey P. Paris, 145th Dist.
Rep. Amy Morrin Bello, 28th Dist.
Sen. Jan Hochadel, 13th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The question of what to do with corpses of the recently deceased is important. With traditional burial expensive, and individuals worried about their legacy impact on the environment from cremation, the state allowing for an alternative is of interest to many. This bill seeks to provide a path to terramation to allow for bodies to be handled in an alternative way.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language changed the bills' objective to conduct a study into how legislation on this issue should be structured in the future.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manish Juthani, Commissioner, Department of Health

The Commissioner believes the bill is outside the DPH's scope of funeral services. The Department states they would have to hire additional staff, which is not recommended in the Governor's budget adjustments. The Department believes new regulation will be required, which they currently do not have any expertise, and new certification programs would need to be developed. Their Vital Records Office will be greatly impacted as natural organic reduction will be classified as an alternative method of disposal on death certificates. They suggest the bill will need several revisions to identify DPH and other agency responsibilities.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director, CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs

The testifier states terramation, or human composting, allows the body to decompose naturally and returning the body to the soil. Conventional burial practices involve non-renewal materials, embalming fluids that have a significant impact on the environment. They believe natural burial methods reduce the negative impacts potentially reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Jonathan Green, Connecticut Funeral Directors Association

The Association believes regulatory recommendations would include a facility to perform natural organic reduction that are licensed and subject to annual renewals and inspections by the Department of Health. They recount natural Organic Reduction Facilities in Washington state, and how the Governor of New York has moved to include under homes in their legislation. The Association believes regulatory and language provisions would enhance this bill to be more appropriate for Connecticut and their existing statues. Finally, they believe choosing natural burial allows individuals to contribute to the preservation and restoration of natural areas.

Lori Brown, Executive Director, CT League of Conservation Voters

The positive effects of natural body composting on the environment are significant. There is a lower carbon footprint, no hazardous embalming chemicals are released, saving the forests by not using wood or metal caskets and no longer using concrete vaults, grave liners and headstones. Terramation was supported last year by the Connecticut funeral industry.

Clair Walsh

The testifier is concerned with the devastating impact of climate change on our environment. They believe terramation is a sustainable option for those Connecticut residents who do not want to be embalmed or cremated and it does not add to air pollution or require cemetery space.

Jennifer Chu

The testifier believes terramation: requires less energy, utilizes no toxic chemicals, has less expense, conserves energy, and provides nutrients to the soil; it is an important option to provide for a final contribution to the community and the planet.

Laura Copland

As an environmentalist this is a sound alternative to traditional burials. Cremations pollute the air and caskets require toxic embalming chemicals. Green burials avoid the use of fossil fuels and provide a natural, organic means to reduce humans safely and with dignity.

Amber Forrest

The testifier believes terramation provides environmental benefits by providing a natural and cost-effective alternative to traditional burials, which use toxic chemicals and require the use of large amounts of land for cemeteries, along with carbon emissions though cremation. They respect the religious groups and small businesses in funeral homes but simply make this as option for those who wish to return to the earth naturally as ash.

Laura Borla, Linda Carlson, Katie Digianantonio, Jane Cavanaugh, Caroline Miller, David Klein, David and Sandra Olsen, Roseann Ventimiglia:

The above also submitted testimony in support of the bill as an alternative with no negative impact on our environment.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Stephen Mendelson

The testifier expresses the belief that terramation seeks to promote human composting as if the deceased were garbage to be recycled into soil and fertilizer, which they find to be a slight against human dignity. Jewish funeral practices are almost entirely consistent with green burial, with no embalming or metal caskets as halacha does not permit environmentally damaging practices. They express the belief that there is nothing natural, organic, or gentle about human composting, raising a question of how we can prevent the co-mingling of human compost with other soils and fertilizers for sale. They request that the bill prohibit the use of human remains from being disposed for agricultural or commercial purposes.

Cathy Ludlum

The testifier believes that bodies need to be treated with reverence, and the idea of turning them into fertilizer and mulch sickens them. Placing remains in public forests or in the food chain involves people in ways they may not want to accept. They question if we will be planning to incorporate human remains into the production of food by using them to fertilize our crops.

Reported by: Pamela Bianca

Date: March 26th, 2024