



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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March 30, 2023

*Testimony of Representative Vicki Doudera presenting*  
**LD 536, An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Vicki Doudera and I represent House District 41, which includes Camden and Rockport. I am here before you today to present **LD 536, An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil.**

Natural organic reduction, or NOR, is the contained, accelerated conversion of human remains to soil. You will also hear it called “terramation” or body composting, but natural organic reduction is the scientific name, and the one that I will use. LD 536 amends current law governing cremation and burial by casket to allow this practice to happen in Maine. NOR facilities, as defined by this bill, are simply places, licensed by the Department of Health & Human Services, where this process can occur.

This is a bill about the last choice many of us will make – what we would like our death care to be, and how we would like our bodies to be disposed of.

Currently six states (Washington, Oregon, California, Vermont, Colorado, and New York) allow for natural organic reduction, and the number of states interested in the process is growing. I’m here before you because many Mainers would also like this choice after death.

Following the passage of New York’s law last fall, constituents in my district reached out to me, as did the constituents of Senator Hickman, the bill’s lead cosponsor, and the constituents of Reps. Sargent, Zeigler, and Jauch. Maine residents who would like this death care option are people of all faiths and from all walks of life. The other legislators and I took their requests seriously and submitted separate bills to the Revisor of Statutes office, and we have joined together to present LD 536 to you today.

Here are the basic facts. The process of natural organic reduction takes about four weeks. It uses large vessels to hold human remains which are combined with straw, wood chips, alfalfa, and other natural materials. The decomposing process is odorless. It creates heat of over 131° F,

which kills viruses (including Covid 19), bacteria, and pathogens. The resulting soil – about 1 cubic yard – can be interred in a traditional way, scattered like ashes, or used to nourish trees or ornamental gardens.

You will hear much testimony today about the environmental benefits of NOR, as it is widely viewed as a sustainable, or “green” alternative to traditional cremation and burial. But I want to focus on what I think is important – consumer choice. To me, that is the crux of this bill.

Natural organic reduction appeals to anyone with a deep connection to the land and a desire for more funeral options for themselves and their family. Farmers have used mortality composting for many decades in order to safely dispose of their deceased livestock. It has been tested and scientifically proven at Western Carolina University, Washington State University, Cornell and the University of Minnesota– all have demonstrated the viability of NOR as a safe and natural method of disposition. Our own CDC will testify that NOR is not a threat to public health or the environment if properly carried out in accordance with the conditions outlined in the proposed legislation.

Mainers should have the freedom to return to the earth in a way that resonates with their lives and values. For many, natural organic reduction is becoming their preferred option. It is a safe and tested process, a method of death care that will be regulated in the same way we regulate burial and cremation.

I strongly believe that we should have this choice in Maine, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

*Representative Vicki Doudera*