

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Peter Wiley, and I've been a resident of Brunswick for the last 15 years. I am here in support of **LD 536, An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil**, and I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on this legislation.

I had not heard of natural organic reduction until a few months ago, so you're not alone if this seems like a new concept. I first heard about it in a newspaper article I read in December. It's really a pretty simple concept that is more in line with what humans have done with bodies for thousands of years, excluding the last 150 years or so. As the father of three school-aged children, I try to do what I can to minimize the impact I have on the environment and believe that collectively, we can act to turn the tide on climate change to leave our children and grandchildren with a brighter future. Natural organic reduction would be a pretty easy way to reduce carbon emissions. When my wife and I started a family, I made up a will and I had noted that I want to be cremated, thinking this was an environmentally friendly option—it's actually not, I've learned recently, at least compared to natural organic reduction. Natural organic reduction emits just one-eighth to one-tenth¹ of the carbon dioxide emitted by cremation. Cremation is now the most popular option in the US for putting the dead to rest (with cremation accounting for nearly 60%² of those who die), and Maine actually ranks second in the country in terms of cremation, with 80%² of those who die being cremated. Natural organic reduction would just be another consumer choice for folks, and that's all we're asking for here—that it be a choice. I want the freedom to decide what happens to my body, and that's what this legislation will support.

This legislation would also support a potential economic opportunity for Maine for companies that have already figured out efficient technology for natural organic reduction. Why not welcome more business development in our state? NOR would all take place within a licensed, regulated industry—this isn't something anyone can just do in their backyard, and this legislation offers assurance that only professionals will handle NOR.

Also, Maine wouldn't be the first state to make natural organic reduction legal. In fact, six other states have already gone before us. As you know well, many Mainers would surely welcome this eco-friendly option, wanting to be buried in a way that minimizes environmental impact.

Finally, on a spiritual level, there's some appealing to me about being folded back into the organic life cycle. Maybe that sounds weird and some may say this isn't a "dignified" option, but for me, the idea of returning my body to nature is perhaps the most dignified option with respect to this planet. I know there are folks who might oppose this bill on religious grounds, but as a Christian, I find comfort in the Bible's repeated reminders that we're all just made of this earth, like this one from Genesis 3:19, "By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your bread until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." NOR is very much in line with a Christian view on what should happen to our bodies when we die.

Again, please pass this legislation, and thank you for listening to me today.

¹ Caitlin Doughty, "If You Want to Give Something Back to Nature, Give Your Body," *The New York Times*, 12/5/22, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/12/05/opinion/human-composting-new-york.html>

² Cremation Association of North America, 3/29/03, <https://www.cremationassociation.org/page/IndustryStatistics>