

TO: The Honorable Joseph Baldacci
The Honorable Michele Meyer, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

DATE: April 4, 2023

RE: LD 536 - An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil

My name is Debra McDonough and I am a 20-year resident of Scarborough. I'm here today to testify in support of **LD 536 - An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil**. I want to thank Representative Doudera and the impressive list of cosponsors, many of whom submitted similar pieces of legislation that have been combined into the bill in front of you.

I support LD 536 because I want Natural Organic Reduction for my own end of life care - and without this legislation this option won't be available to me. I am by training a biologist, by persuasion an organic gardener and by vocation an advocate for creation care, and I believe that the molecules currently serving as an essential component of my own body are also an essential component of the broader nutrient cycle - a cycle that is disrupted by many of the common funerary practices.

I first encountered this concept last summer when I arrived at my parents' house in Colorado. After the obligatory round of Dad's "When-I-Die-Scavenger-Hunt," he announced that he's changed his mind and wants to be composted. I told him I'd do what I could, but was pretty sure that wasn't legal. As fate would have it, the podcast I'd cued up for the next leg of my drive included an interview with Katrina Spade, describing the phenomenal work she and her colleagues have done in Washington state to develop a safe, ecologically sound and respectful process to return a human body to the soil. That night in my motel, I learned that Colorado had recently passed enabling legislation. I also learned that Maine had not.

And that's where you come in. I hope that each of you will support this bill, so that I - and others in Maine who feel as I do - can choose Natural Organic Reduction for our end of life care. The beautiful thing about this bill is that it does not restrict the options for anyone else. People who want to be buried in a cemetery can still choose to be buried in a cemetery. People who want to be cremated can choose cremation. This bill simply expands our options.

I do have one more request. The end product of Natural Organic Reduction is finished compost - safe and suitable for use as a soil amendment. It's not clear to me from the bill text whether the family or authorized representative of the deceased will be able to retrieve this material for use on their own landscape plantings. While I can not predict what my own family might choose, I do encourage you to ensure that this will be an option.