

APRIL 6, 2020

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF **SAMANTHA SIEBER** TO ACCOMPANY VERBAL TESTIMONY

SP 396: AN ACT TO ALLOW CREMATORIES USING CHEMICAL DISSOLUTION PROCESSES IN FACILITIES OTHER THAN CEMETERIES.

## I. Quick Points

1. Testifying **IN SUPPORT** of SP 396
2. **This funeral law restricting the location of crematoriums does not add any consumer, public health and safety, or environmental protection.**
3. Municipalities have the jurisdiction, sophistication, and tools to determine proper use and location in their unique communities *like they do already, every single day with pet crematoriums that don't fall under the purview of this Funeral law.*
4. Municipalities find Dissolution equipment to be a good fit in a variety of locations, usually light industrial and commercially zoned facilities.
  - a. This equipment does not produce noise or odor.
  - b. There is no possibility of smoke, and there is not an increased fire risk to the building.
  - c. It does not require an EPA Air Quality Permit like flame equipment requires because it does not produce any harmful emissions.
  - d. From the outside of a building with a flame crematory, you may notice a large visible smokestack. From the outside of an Aquamation facility, you would never know the equipment is inside.
5. Non-cemetery locations offer great benefits
  - a. When a 21st century family experiences a loss, if someone's mom or dad, or son or daughter doesn't have to be taken to a location off-site, this could bring great piece of mind.
  - b. It adds to the services that a local business like a funeral home can provide on-site. Some cultures like to participate in being on-site and pushing the button. This can be done in the same convenient location where they made the arrangements.
  - c. Small funeral homes would have amazing flexibility with scheduling services if they didn't have to bend to the schedule of an off-site third party.
  - d. It will allow the market to determine what families want, and like the rest of the United States, these businesses will develop what Maine families want. Nicer facilities, not banished to the outskirts of town, with nicer amenities.
6. I respectfully ask the lawmakers of Maine to consider today this law as it stands negatively impacts the people of Maine. It restricts their options. There is no basis in favor of safety or consumers here. Families do not have a do-over five or ten years from now when the law finally changes. It needs to be changed now in order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century families.

Full Letter:

My name is Samantha Sieber and I'm grateful for the opportunity to support SP 396, An Act To Allow Crematories Using Chemical Dissolution Processes in Facilities Other Than Cemeteries. I've spent the last 15 years helping over 40 states draft legislative language to accommodate what families know as Aquamation; technically referred to in law as alkaline hydrolysis or chemical dissolution.

Maine was a leader in making this option available to families. Over a decade ago, a family from Searsport who owned a crematorium came to visit my family's company, where we make the equipment. They wanted to see it work, and as longtime crematorium operators, they couldn't believe how clean it was. A few months later we installed their machine right here in Maine, and for a decade this business has been able to offer this option to families.

Many families being offered this option are hearing about it for the first time, but it is certainly not new. I grew up around this technology from a very young age, as my father was an inventor. The roots are in the scientific field. Albany Medical College in New York put their first piece of equipment in back in 1992. There are hundreds of alkaline hydrolysis systems, which comes along with 30 years of scrutiny, research, and supporting data on this process.

It's not too good to be true. It runs on a surprisingly small amount of electricity, doesn't produce harmful emissions, and uses the same amount of water a household of four uses in a single day. But what it does for families is even more important. Burial is sacred to some cultures. Fire and therefore flame cremation is sacred to other cultures. And what I've learned as well is that some people have an aversion to fire or they have loved water their entire life and want Aquamation. It's very personal, and it's so important for families to have choices.

There are some seemingly strange laws governing the funeral profession. Some are just outdated and overlooked, but others persist despite a lot of advocacy for change. In Pennsylvania, funeral homes can't serve food anywhere on the premises. People have been fighting for years to have that law changed so they can simply have the services that we take for granted here in Indiana and Maine. At my grandpa's service seven years ago, we served the sandwich he was famous for with his grandkids. What a peanut butter and honey sandwich did for us at that time— I call it craughing. You don't know if you're crying or laughing, it's a mess of both, but it was a big part of how we said goodbye. Sandwiches at a service are not for everyone, but I can't imagine why that option wouldn't at least be available to any family in our country that wanted it.

Sandwiches in a funeral home are not a public health and safety issue, and yet there is heavy lobby against it year after year in Pennsylvania. Crematoriums being located outside of cemetery land is not a public health and safety issue, either.

Only a few states have this old law. I'm not an expert, but I think it's three or four. Across the US and in other countries, businesses like funeral homes and crematoriums that receive municipal approval are permitted to have the equipment right on site. Some cultures participate more in the process, like pushing the button to start the cremation. But more commonly, families are grateful that their loved one stays on site, maybe in their own town, with who they entrusted for their care, instead of being transported elsewhere.

Unlike Maine, Michigan crematoriums don't have to be located within a cemetery. But in Michigan, per a different cavern of Funeral Law, an owner of a funeral home cannot own a crematorium. Like Maine's current restriction to cemeteries, it leaves us wondering why. I'm sure it won't be surprising to anyone that a staggering amount of funera-home-owner spouses and children own crematoriums in Michigan. With buildings right across the street that house the equipment. The cities would have approved the equipment to go right inside the funeral home, but instead there is an entirely separate business and building. Who carries the financial burden for that law? Businesses, and ultimately bereaved families.

These crematorium laws being decades outside of their prime are not as obvious as Pennsylvania's no-food law, but what I ask you to consider today is that all of these laws I've mentioned negatively impact the people of Maine. They hurt families, and restrict their options. There is no basis in favor of consumers here, and families do not have a do-over five or ten years from now when the law finally changes. It needs to be changed now.

**This funeral law restricting the location of crematoriums does not add any consumer, public health and safety, or environmental protection.** Municipalities have the jurisdiction, sophistication, and tools to determine proper use in their unique communities like they do every single day with pet crematoriums that don't fall under the purview of this Funeral law.

I've been able to install Aquamation equipment in historic downtown funeral homes in the middle of residential neighborhoods where the installation of flame crematories had been denied by the municipalities. In fact, I've installed over 250 of these systems for pet and human Aquamation where flame crematories would not have been approved. This has been done despite great scrutiny by town planning and development boards, and state-level regulatory authorities.

Municipalities find it a good fit in a variety of locations, usually light industrial and commercially zoned facilities. This equipment does not produce noise or odor. There is no possibility of smoke, and there is not an increased fire risk to the building. It does not require an EPA Air Quality Permit like flame equipment requires because it does not produce any harmful emissions. From the outside of a building with a flame crematory, you may notice a large visible smokestack. From the outside of an Aquamation facility, you would never know the equipment is inside.

With improved technologies, we don't have to banish services that people want close— to the outskirts of our society. When a 21<sup>st</sup> century family experiences a loss, if someone's mom or dad, or son or daughter doesn't have to be taken to a location off-site, this could bring great piece of mind. It adds to the services that a local business like a funeral home can provide on-site. I hope that if the past year has taught us anything, it is that our funeral professionals are heroes to us, and so important to our communities. Please help Maine families have easier access to this option, with increased possibilities for viewings and the meaningful services that go along with it. Please move this bill forward.

Very respectfully,

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