

1/22/2012—Someone in the state of Virginia has a case of the "ickies." If not we can't imagine why the state legislature is [considering a bill to ban alkaline hydrolysis](#). Alkaline hydrolysis is the process of dissolving the body into an inert liquid using a bath of water and potassium hydroxide—basically it's dissolving the body in lye. What's left is a sterile liquid and fine bone fragments (these can be given back to the family in powdered form as is done with cremated remains). Ewww. . .that's horrific, right? Not really. What we Americans

find "dignified" or "horrible" when it comes to body disposal isn't based on any universal notion of "proper" burial. We tend to find the things we're used to "dignified" and those we're not used to "undignified." People had the same reaction to cremation (and think about it---what's nicer about burning a body in a 1600 degree oven?) when it was introduced in the 1870s.

Whatever the motivation behind HB 379, it serves no good public policy purpose. Consumers should be able to select the form of disposition that appeals to them so long as the process poses no danger to the public. As Isabel Berney of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge wrote,

Dear members of the Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee:

Please kill HB379.

There are many reasons why alkaline hydrolysis should be permitted. It is more environmentally friendly than cremation. It is allowed now in three states for human remains and in many more states by schools of veterinary medicine to dispose of large animals. It takes less energy than cremation, its end product is sterile and can be treated by a standard water treatment system.

This is often opposed by the funeral home industry just as that industry opposed cremation. Now that cremation is widely accepted, funeral homes are seeing a decrease in conventional funerals and their profits. It is important for consumers to have a choice. It is important to support alternatives that leave a smaller carbon footprint. It is important for you to consider the wishes of many ordinary citizens who would appreciate the choice of a lower cost, better

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alternative than what now exists. Our organization is one of four such groups in Virginia. We have more than 260 members in southwest Virginia – from Abingdon to Lynchburg. We are advocates for the consumer; this bill does not serve their needs.

Please vote against HB379.