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**Delivery Via Email Only**

The Honorable Patrick A. Hope  
General Assembly Building, Room 709  
201 North 9th Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: **HB 52 - Alkaline hydrolysis; registration; regulations.**

Dear Chair Hope:

This letter is to register our company's unqualified support for a favorable committee report on HB 52 -- Alkaline hydrolysis; registration; regulations. Alkaline hydrolysis is often called "water cremation," "flameless cremation" or "Aquamation®" because, instead of incineration, it reduces a body using 95% hot water and 5% alkaline chemicals to produce "ashes" that are returned to the family. We also propose a very minor technical amendment that is explained below.

I have been working as a funeral professional in Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Falls Church, Virginia, for nearly a decade. In my day job today, after becoming a licensed funeral director and embalmer in all three jurisdictions, I am a practicing cemeterian – the Director of Funerals for Historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

But I also am a co-founder of Green Legacy, a startup launching the first eco-friendly funeral home looking for a home to serve families in the "DMV" – that is, NOVA – D.C. – and the Maryland suburbs. Indeed, our company already has been evaluating commercial property options in most of NOVA – basically, Districts 37 to 40, and the Springfield area in District 35.

Legalizing alkaline hydrolysis, fundamentally, is about empowering families to choose how their loved ones should be honored. As a death care professional, it has been my privilege to support families of all sorts of cultural and religious backgrounds as they honor their departed: siblings singing *Más Allá Se Pase Lista*, eating tamales and drinking coffee after the ceremony; adult children following Catholic rituals before a repast in the country club; or a lively cohort dancing in front of their patriarch's casket in sync with Nigerian Gospel music blasted by a deejay.

But families who want "green" death care choices in Virginia and other nearby states necessarily will remain limited without good reason until our jurisdictions legalize the regulation of alkaline hydrolysis. Over the past several years, I have received multiple calls from people interested in alkaline hydrolysis for their loved ones, but our local funeral establishments were totally powerless to help them. For that reason, after establishing a working relationship with a funeral

The Honorable Patrick A. Hope

January 29, 2024

Re: HB 52 - Alkaline hydrolysis; registration; regulations.

Page 2

home that provides alkaline hydrolysis in North Carolina, my standard practice now is to connect families with local funeral homes who are trusted to transport out-of-state, where families can have access to water cremation.

Although several “green” or “natural” burial options are available within our region, those options simply do not work for everyone. Many still want the simplicity, affordability, and flexibility of cremation, rather than a cemetery plot. And given the choice, many would prefer a more eco-friendly cremation if it were available.

At this point, starting from a patent that is more than 100 years old and technology legalized in about 20 states, alkaline hydrolysis is a proven process with proven everyday appeal. Virginia should give the people who devote so much time and effort to following a “sustainable lifestyle” the option of leaving with a sustainable death. Indeed, the renowned Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu chose water cremation to process his bodily remains after death. As widely reported in the press, he had no self-interest in making that decision; rather, Archbishop Tutu said he was trying to advance the best interest of humanity.

Our one suggestion to improve HB 52 is to eliminate the word “*pressure*” from the definition of “*alkaline hydrolysis*.” Specifically, the term “*pressure*” in the definitional phrase for § 54.1-2800 -- i.e., “*using alkaline chemicals, heat, agitation and pressure to accelerate natural decomposition*” -- may have an unintended consequence. That is, only certain models of alkaline hydrolysis equipment utilize extra pressure. So including that word in the definition may effectively disqualify other models of perfectly good equipment. For that reason, we propose its deletion.

All that being said, we want to extend our sincere gratitude and support to Delegate Taylor for her courageous introduction of this bill. We unequivocally encourage the Health Subcommittee to follow her capable lead on this score.

I look forward to visiting with the subcommittee for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Lily Buerkle

Co-Founder and Licensed Funeral Director