



## PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: April 27, 2021

RE: **Testimony on Senate Bill 228**

TO: The Senate Committee on Health

FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you fellow Health Committee members for hearing my testimony in support of Senate Bill 228 (SB 228).

This bill would allow Wisconsin to join the number of states which already permit “flameless cremation”. This process replaces flame and heat with alkaline hydrolysis which reduces human remains to bone fragments and cremated remains through a water-based dissolution process which uses alkaline chemicals, heat, agitation and pressure to accelerate decomposition.

A number of Wisconsin funeral directors are receiving more and more requests for flameless or water cremation. Those funeral directors may only accommodate such a request by having the body transported to a surrounding state where such a process is permitted.

More and more families are seeing cremation as a preferred method of final disposition of remains. In 2016, the cremation rate surpassed the casketed-burial rate for the first time in U.S. history. In Wisconsin, that trend is even more pronounced, with cremations overtaking burials over a decade ago. As of last year, 61% of deaths in Wisconsin were cremated versus 31% who were buried. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) project that by 2040 about 80% of the state’s deceased will be cremated.

Consumers are choosing cremation over burials for a number of issues, including costs, a more transient population, changing religious beliefs and affiliations and general consumer preferences. One consumer preference that people have is perceived environmental impact. Alkaline hydrolysis is recognized as a more bio-friendly option. It uses one-seventh of the energy required for traditional cremation and does not produce the same amount of carbon dioxide a flame cremation emits.

I believe in allowing consumers choices. And if a consumer chooses flameless cremation, I would like to empower Wisconsin funeral directors the means to fulfill that choice. I hope you will join me in supporting SB 228.

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# TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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DATE: April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 228  
TO: The Senate Committee on Health  
FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

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Thank you, Chairman Testin, and members of the Committee on Health for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 228 (SB228), relating to allowing for the use of alkaline hydrolysis to cremate human remains.

Senate Bill 228 is a reintroduction of 2019 Assembly Bill 492/ 2019 Senate Bill 443. This bill would add Wisconsin to the list of states which permit the cremation of human remains with water and an alkaline solution as an alternative to flame cremation or burial. Currently there are 19 states that allow for alkaline hydrolysis.

Current flame based cremation uses flame and heat to reduce human remains to bone fragments or cremated remains. Alkaline hydrolysis is an alternative process which instead reduces human remains to bone fragments and cremated remains through a water-based dissolution process using alkaline chemicals, heat, agitation and pressure to accelerate nature decomposition.

I became aware of this issue last session, after speaking with a number of Wisconsin funeral directors who explained the increased need for alkaline hydrolysis. Under current state law, a Wisconsin funeral director may only accommodate this request by having the body transported to another state where flameless cremation is permitted.

For years, the cremation rate has been steadily rising in the United States. In 2016 the cremation rate surpassed the casketed-burial rate for the first time in U.S. history. In Wisconsin, the trend is more pronounced with cremations overtaking burials over a decade ago. In 2020 over 60% of deaths in Wisconsin resulted in cremation compared to 31% in burial according to projections compiled by the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). This figure is expected to increase by 2040 with projections showing that some 80% of the state's deceased will be cremated.

This trend towards cremation has led to a steady increase in crematoriums in the United States. Since 2017 there has been an approximate 10% increase in crematory licenses in the U.S. and according to the NFDA another 11% of funeral homes intend to open their own crematory in the next five years.

Choosing cremation over burials has become popular for a number of reasons including costs, the increasing aging population, changing religious beliefs and affiliations and general preferences. Alkaline hydrolysis also has the added benefit of being recognized as a more bio-friendly option, as it uses one-seventh of the energy used in flammable cremations while refraining from emitting any carbon dioxide.

Alkaline hydrolysis will provide families and funeral home directors another option if they prefer water cremation to flame cremation or casket burials. This is a service funeral directors are prepared to offer and we should make sure Wisconsin law can accommodate rather than prevent this choice.



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Patrick Testin  
Members, Senate Committee on Health

FROM: Kim Vercauteren, Executive Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference

DATE: April 27, 2021

RE: Opposition to Senate Bill 228, Disposition of Human through Alkaline Hydrolysis

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in opposition to Senate Bill 228, which would allow for the disposition of human remains through alkaline hydrolysis.

Alkaline hydrolysis dissolves the deceased by placing the body in a vat of water and chemicals, which is heated until the body turns to liquid. The liquid is then treated as wastewater and either disposed of through a wastewater system or boiled away, leaving pieces of bone behind that can be ground or pulverized.

Catholic teaching is centered on the life and dignity of the human person because each person is created in the image and likeness of God. The human body is a physical, material manifestation of God's image and shares in that dignity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 364). Even in death, we show reverence and compassion for God's creation by praying for and laying to rest the departed and caring for those grieving the death of a loved one.

The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit. (*CCC*, no. 2300).

The heart, mind, flesh, and bones of a human person are all elements of a unique creation, down to the DNA, which must be honored even after death. Our concern is that with alkaline hydrolysis, remains are washed into a wastewater system as though the body created by God never existed. Wastewater does not honor the sacredness of the body, nor does it allow the grieving to honor the dead after disposition.

Respect for the dead is a shared value protected and promoted by Wisconsin law. It is why state law instructs how and when a corpse may be moved (Wis. Stats. S. 69.18); how and when disposition may occur (Wis. Stats. Chapters 154 and 157), including cremation (Wis. Stats. Chapter 440); and why Wisconsin criminalizes the mutilation or hiding of a corpse (Wis. Stats. s. 940.11).

Alkaline hydrolysis is an aberration from the traditional treatment of human remains in

Wisconsin, which is acknowledged in the language of Senate Bill 228. Under the current Wisconsin Statutes s. 440.70(5):

“Cremated remains” means human remains recovered from the cremation of a human body or body part and the residue of a container or foreign materials that were cremated with the body or body part.

However, SB 228 specifically amends s. 440.70(5) to exclude “the sterile liquid resulting from cremation by alkaline hydrolysis.” This liquid is not considered part of the cremated remains, though it includes all the organic matter that makes up a human person. Senate Bill 228 treats much of the deceased as waste, not cremated remains under the law.

While the Church recognizes and permits cremation, it is allowed as a burial selection in addition to customary interment because the body may remain “as-one” even though it is reduced to ashes. Under Church teaching, respectful final disposition of cremated remains involves interment or entombment of all remains in the consecrated grounds of a cemetery. The body is sacred and is buried whole, even as ashes. This standard is impossible to maintain through alkaline hydrolysis.

The WCC is also concerned with using the mantle of stewardship and care for creation to validate the use of alkaline hydrolysis. The practice can use anywhere from 100 to 300 gallons of water and can influence pH levels in the water supply. We question whether a process that alters the chemical composition of large amounts of clean water, an increasingly diminishing resource, is good stewardship.

The Catholic Church is not opposed to more environmentally-conscience burial options. Wisconsin permits green burial and families may opt for a more direct burial, which does not require embalming and some of the other intervening steps that are traditionally included in a traditional burial.

In over 600 Catholic cemeteries throughout Wisconsin, our care for the departed continues and we remain committed to the ministry of respecting God’s image reflected in the human person. Alkaline hydrolysis does not align with the value and respect for the dead and the WCC strongly urges you to oppose Senate Bill 228.

Thank you.

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# GABRIEL SCHAUF

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April 19<sup>th</sup> 2021

## To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Gabriel Schauf. I am a Wisconsin licensed funeral director and currently work as an instructor and the Program Coordinator for the Milwaukee Area Technical College Funeral Service program. I apologize for my absence as my teaching duty calls and we are a few weeks away from finals. I write today in support of Alkaline Hydrolysis and SB 228.

As educators in this profession, part of our job is to explore innovations and find opportunities to better serve the needs of our families. This certainly includes methods of disposition. As you may have learned from other testimonies, Alkaline Hydrolysis is considered an alternate form of flame cremation, a form of disposition that has been in practice for a very long time. What you might not know, is that while the concept of alkaline hydrolysis for commercial use is relatively new, the process has been used around the world for years (first developed in 1888). Only recently, has it emerged as a new and greener funeral option provided to families (first offered in the US in 2011). Since that time, especially with the rate of cremation continuing to rise, alkaline hydrolysis has gained in popularity for many reasons, some of which I would like to share with you today.


- **Better for the environment than cremation** - The process involves a solution of around 95% water and 5% potassium hydroxide and simply accelerates the natural decomposition process with the addition of heat and pressure. The byproducts are a sterile solution, environmentally suitable to drain into municipal water systems (far cleaner than most wastewater), and bone fragments, which is like what is currently returned to the family after a flame cremation. 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the energy used for flame cremation is consumed through the process and there are zero airborne emissions. This is a great reduction to our carbon footprint.

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- **Less Invasive Process...** – For some, the perception of fire and burning can bring about anxiety. The process of preparing a body for flame cremation and the flame cremation itself may be considered by some as “aggressive”. Bodies being cremated need to have medical devices removed ahead of time because the heat (1,800 degrees) can cause them to explode. Part of the cremation process includes direct flame on the body, as well as the use of turbulence within the machine which helps the combustible materials and volatile contents to be burned off. By comparison, alkaline hydrolysis mixes a solution, heats the contents to no more than 300 degrees and gently agitates the solution to accelerate the process of natural decomposition. The bone fragments left remain in place within the chamber throughout the entire process and medical devices need not be removed prior. In fact, those medical devices are even found to be in better condition and more easily recycled with alkaline hydrolysis compared to flame cremation.
  - **...with A Better Result** – To those that oppose alkaline hydrolysis due to concerns, perhaps religious, that parts of the body are being lost or “spread out”, it should be known that the results of flame cremation are in fact similar. With Alkaline hydrolysis, some of the body is being washed away. With flame cremation, some of the body is being expelled into the atmosphere. However, with those concerns in mind, when compared to flame cremation, one of the biggest advantages is a 100% return of the cremated remains, or bone fragments, after. Due to the nature of flame cremation, inadvertent or incidental commingling of minute particles of cremated remains from the residue of previous cremations will occur. Essentially particles of those previously cremated will be mixed with those cremated in the future. Particles of any given cremation will also be left behind as well. Despite the best efforts of crematory operators, it is inevitable. However, with alkaline hydrolysis, any fragments left behind will be gathered and returned to the family or buried with no inclusion of previous cases. In fact, there is even a 35% increase in the amount of remains returned to the family.

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These are just some of the many arguments in support of adding alkaline hydrolysis as an acceptable form of disposition in the state of Wisconsin. I'll rely on others to provide more information. In the meantime, I ask you to stand in favor of this legislation. People are different. As such, they have different needs and desires – including how they are cared for in death. By recognizing alkaline hydrolysis as an acceptable form of disposition, we are providing another option that many will value and certainly find peace of mind in.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabriel Schauf". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

**Gabriel Schauf**