

Testimony on H. 25, Natural Burial Grounds, February 5, 2015, by Mary Alice Bisbee, mbisbee@myfairpoint.net, Vice President, Funeral Consumers Alliance of Vermont

My testimony today reflects only my personal opinions about H. 25 as no formal vote of our organizational membership has been taken on this issue. However, I can state that the idea of expanding green burial sites in Vermont has been a strong priority to our membership, in general, over the past several years.

It has always been an option to bury ones relatives on land owned by family members, but expanding this right to non landowners who want earth burial of their bodies or cremated remains in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way is a great step forward in promoting the Vermont ideals of conserving land and protecting our precious environment. Many Vermonters now want the option to know that their remains are contributing to preserving our precious land resources and that their final resting place will be secure "in perpetuity".

Personally, I find this bill one that I support, wholeheartedly, largely due to the fact that it separates natural burial grounds from the rules and regulations affecting Vermont cemeteries, repeals § 5369, REMOVAL, and requires that all Natural Burial Grounds be owned and managed by a non profit corporation rather than a single land owner. § 5431 whose title you may want to change to: CEMETERY AND NATURAL BURIAL GROUND ASSOCIATIONS; CORPORATIONS, rightly puts the responsibility for carrying out this revised statute on the corporation and not any one individual.

My primary concern is that § 5317, TAX EXEMPTION could be subject to misuse by taking large tracts of land out of use and calling it a "natural burial ground". Perhaps some way of limiting the acreage so preserved may be in order. I would personally like to see some of our large land preserved areas of Vermont set aside parts of their holdings for natural burial ground usage when appropriate, for a financially affordable alternative for low income folks. Animal remains are often found in the forest and we are animals. Why not human remains, as well, so long as there is a paper trail as to their identity and location?

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