

Rep. Mike Yantachka - Testimony on H.25 - Natural Burials

Prior to learning about "green burials" from Lisa Carlson, the author along with Joshua Slocum of "Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death", I was aware of only two "normal" ways of laying the dead to rest: embalming and cremation. I knew that in the third world the dead were buried without the caskets and vaults we take for granted in the U.S., but I assumed that that was because they could not afford to do it our way.

Lisa pointed out to me that current day burial practices are a relatively new development with many downsides. Embalming requires the use of toxic chemicals and huge burial vaults large enough to contain the traditional full-size casket. Cremation requires very high temperatures generated by burning fossil fuels. On the other hand, the practice we call "green burial" requires neither and allows us to "return to dust" in the natural way that all other living beings do. This burial method is already allowed by state law, but must take place in specially reserved areas of existing cemeteries. Orthodox Jews as well as Muslims practice this type of burial as a religious practice.

This bill will expand the allowable use of the green burial method in an even more natural way. It establishes the right of a landowner to set aside a section of land where such burials can be performed with the additional characteristic that would not require a grave marker, but would allow the land, a field or forest, to return to its natural state. While it would require the site to be registered as a natural burial ground, it would allow, but not require, the gravesite to be platted for future reference.

While most people may still prefer to be buried or to bury their relatives in the usual manner in a traditional cemetery, H.25 will provide an alternative for those who wish their bodies to "return to nature" in a more permanent and natural way.