

Chairwoman Ray, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Brent, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 591.

House Bill 591 is a commonsense update to Ohio law that authorizes natural organic reduction as an additional option for the final disposition of human remains.

At the end of the day, this bill is really about something simple giving Ohio families another choice during one of the most difficult times in their lives. Right now, families are generally limited to burial or cremation. This legislation doesn't take anything away from those options, it just adds another, for those who want it.

I've heard from constituents who are looking for alternatives that better reflect their personal values, their beliefs, or even just their wishes for how they want to be remembered. And I think most of us would agree those decisions should be left to individuals and their families, not limited by outdated statutes.

One of the most meaningful aspects of natural organic reduction is what it allows families to do afterward. With this option, the remains are returned to the family in a soil-like form. That creates opportunities for more personal, lasting, and living memorials. Families can choose to plant a tree in memory of their loved one, create a memorial garden, or use the soil to restore land that held special meaning whether that's a family property, a favorite outdoor space, or a place tied to important memories. Some may choose to incorporate the soil into flower beds or landscapes that can be visited and cared for over time, creating an ongoing connection rather than a single place of remembrance. For others, it offers a way to honor a loved one's connection to nature, allowing them to quite literally give back to the earth in a way that supports new life. It also provides flexibility for families who may not have access to, or preference for, a traditional cemetery setting.

Importantly, these options are not about replacing tradition, they are about expanding it. Families who prefer burial or cremation can continue to do so. This simply gives another path for those who are seeking something different.

Other states (Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont, California, New York, Nevada, Arizona, Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, Maine, Georgia, and New Jersey) have already moved in this direction, and Ohio is simply working to keep up with evolving preferences while ensuring the process is handled respectfully and with proper oversight. From a policy standpoint, this bill is straightforward. It fits natural organic reduction into existing law, so it is regulated the same way as other methods. It does not create mandates. It does not force anyone to choose this option. It simply allows it.

As a small business owner, I also think it's important that Ohio's funeral and cemetery industries have the ability to adapt to what families are asking for, while maintaining the standards and professionalism we expect. At its core, this legislation is about freedom, dignity, and respecting personal choice. It's about making sure Ohio law reflects the real needs and wishes of the people we serve. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

