



MINNESOTA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Testimony in Opposition to S.F. 3134 (Marty)
Minnesota Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee
March 15, 2024

Chair Latz and Members of the Committee:

We write today in opposition to S.F. 3134 (Marty), which would legalize the composting of human remains to be treated like fertilizer. Human composting is disrespectful to the human body and undermines our respect for the dignity of the human person. It is also more expensive and less environmentally friendly than green burials, which are already legal in Minnesota.

As humans, we share a common understanding of the importance of treating human bodies with respect—cultures around the world and throughout history have developed ceremonies and processes to ensure the respectful treatment and disposition of human remains.

In fact, respect for the dignity of the human person is a bedrock principle of civilized societies. When we start treating human persons, dead or alive, with callous disrespect, we participate in what Pope Francis calls the “throwaway culture.” It may seem harmless, but when we disrespect the bodies of the dead it fosters a callousness in our culture and in our souls with respect to the living.

The main experience with composting for most of us is related to household waste, such as eggshells and food scraps. We toss these unwanted scraps of waste into a container, or a pile in the yard, to be broken down by bacteria and insects, and then spread the resulting compost around the yard or garden. Disposing of human bodies in this way goes against our common and innate human desire to respect the dead. A human body is not household waste and should not be treated as such.

In the human composting process, the human body is typically placed in a bag or steel box and stored for weeks or months in a large facility while the body is broken down. Any remains that are not fully broken down are then mechanically ground to bits. At the end of the process the human remains are mixed in with dirt, to be scattered as desired. With the legalization of human composting, we may unknowingly be walking on human remains, eating vegetables grown with human remains, or our children could be playing in dirt mixed with human remains.

Furthermore, human composting is neither the most affordable, nor the most environmentally friendly option, that exists. Green burials, which are already legal in Minnesota, involve burying the deceased in a shroud or simple wooden box that is placed directly in the ground, in a prairie or other natural area set aside for such burial. Contrary to human composting, which requires large processing facilities and costs on average between \$5,000-\$7,000, green burials are environmentally friendly, are more affordable with the average cost being approximately \$2,500, and are a much more respectful method for the disposition of human remains.

Irrespective of creed or culture, all humans should share in the common work of reverencing human life, even after death. For those who desire it, green burial is already legal in Minnesota and is more affordable, more environmentally friendly, and more respectful to the human body. Composting human bodies as if they were household waste violates our basic, shared human desire to respect the dead. It should not be legal in Minnesota.

Thank you for your consideration.

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