



People's Memorial
A s s o c i a t i o n
Funeral Advocacy & Education since 1939

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September 17, 2025

People's Memorial Association calls on Washington State Legislature to address the mounting cremation crisis and invest in our region's funeral services.

Dear Washington State Legislators,

The funeral industry is facing a growing supply and demand problem. As annual deaths increase, funeral homes and funeral service providers serve more and more families each year while the infrastructure to do so remains the same. At the heart of this capacity issue are retorts (crematory machines) and the high demand Washingtonians have for cremations. 79% of Washingtonians chose cremation as their desired disposition method in 2024. As crematory lines stretch longer and longer, families are left waiting to hear when their loved one can be cared for. We are calling for an investment in our funeral industry in order to avoid a public health crisis that leaves families and their deceased loved ones waiting for disposition and closure.

Over the past thirty years, three factors have combined to create what our organization sees as a looming public health crisis in the funeral services industry. First, corporate consolidation has shuttered many independent funeral homes and centralized operations, meaning more crematories have closed in the past three decades than have opened. Second, environmental regulations have led to increasingly harsher artificial limitations being placed on new crematories despite newer retorts having more environmental control features and significantly decreased overall energy usage. Third, due to an increasing population largely fueled by migration to Washington State and an aging population, the number of deaths per year has continued to climb. King County saw a 9.7% increase in deaths in 2024; that's 1,431 more funerals, or around 1,130 additional cremations in King County alone.

A breaking point is imminent. Data indicates that the funeral industry's capacity in Washington State to meet consumer demand for cremation is at a thin margin. Furthermore, investment in new funeral services is not coming from private investors as it is not a particularly profitable business, exacerbated by the artificial limitations placed on new crematories by the Department of Ecology. As a result, costs are being passed on to the consumer, with prices across all service types increasing every year.



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There do exist promising alternatives to building new crematories. Washington State was the first to pioneer natural organic reduction, a green method of individually composting bodies to produce nutrient-rich soil. We also legalized alkaline hydrolysis in the same bill in 2019, a green alternative to flame cremation that uses water and alkaline chemicals, and takes approximately 1/10th of the energy input to run.

We believe the state can defuse this probable cremation crisis through investment in green funeral service providers. The state should subsidize funeral homes seeking to install or expand capacity for performing natural organic reduction or alkaline hydrolysis dispositions. With increased capacity comes decreased prices. According to People's Memorial Association's research, affordability is the #1 driver of why people are choosing the disposition method they choose.

Alternatively, the state can directly put money in the hands of the consumers by subsidizing the cost of natural organic reduction or alkaline hydrolysis services. By decreasing the cost, the state can signal to funeral service providers that investment in these green methods is the path out of the crisis we are all in.

By 2030, the youngest Baby Boomers will be 65. By 2034, the Census Bureau estimates the "silver" population will outnumber people under 18. That means we need to improve our capacity to handle more deaths per year now, before the full weight of this crisis is upon us.

Cremation capacity in Washington is ill-equipped to handle this increasing demand. The State must question if they should help avoid a public health crisis by investing in our underfunded and ill-equipped funeral industry, an industry that will someday touch every Washingtonian.

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