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Chair O'Brien, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 323.

Senate Bill 323 would provide the ability for grieving families to use natural organic reduction, which is the gentle process of transforming a body into soil. At its core, this bill is designed to honor one of the most personal choices we all make in this lifetime. Natural organic reduction might not be the right choice for everyone, but we should respect and allow this choice for those who want it because it reflects their values.

Natural organic reduction or NOR is a safe, responsible, and dignified process that transforms a body into a soil amendment. Using specially engineered vessels, technology is applied to accelerate a natural process that would otherwise occur in the natural world. No chemicals are used in this process. Funeral directors work closely with families throughout every step, and the process typically takes about one month. Each family receives all or a portion of their loved one's soil. In many cases, families choose to donate some or all the soil to be used for conservation projects.

SB 323 creates choice and clarity in the regulation of the disposition of human remains in the State of Ohio. This legislation recognizes the changing practices in the disposition of human remains while maintaining a robust oversight and respect for local government.

Currently in the State of Ohio, there are two recognized methods of disposition of human remains, which are burial and cremation; however, it does not take into account new and environmentally mindful technologies like NOR that are already being regulated in 14 states across the country. With state regulations not keeping up with the modern forms of funeral practices, this leaves bereaved families, local officials, and funeral services providers not able to meet the needs of Ohioans locally and they are forced to turn elsewhere.

This bill would not create any mandates regarding NOR as an option for Ohioans or for any municipality, township, or county to establish or host a reduction facility. This legislation merely ensures that local governments will retain regulatory authority over zoning and siting, as is currently established for cemeteries and crematories in the State of Ohio. This legislation is designed to create the same regulatory framework for natural organic reduction that local municipalities already regulate for cemeteries and crematories.

Senate Bill 323 provides clarity for local officials by updating references throughout the Revised Code so that coroners, health departments, cemeteries, and municipal authorities have consistent statutory language when carrying out their duties. By creating this consistency in the Revised Code, it will reduce confusion, limit liability, and assist local governments in responding when grieving families request more modern funeral practices.

When looking at the fiscal impact on local government this bill would not mandate any new costs for municipality, township, or county. When developing this new form of funeral practice, it would be privately developed and would be subject to the newly clarified language in Senate Bill 323 for approval by local governments.

In conclusion, this bill respects the personal choice that Ohioans are making for themselves or a loved one. While this bill recognizes a family's wishes in newer funeral methods, it also maintains public health standards by creating regulations for choosing NOR. I leave you with "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.