

Human composting bill garnering attention

By Jesse Leavenworth
STAFF WRITER

Proponents of human composting — the subject of a stalled bill in the Connecticut legislature — call it a planet-friendly alternative to traditional burial or cremation. But opponents say reducing a person to a pile of soil is disrespectful and indecent, even akin to cannibalism.

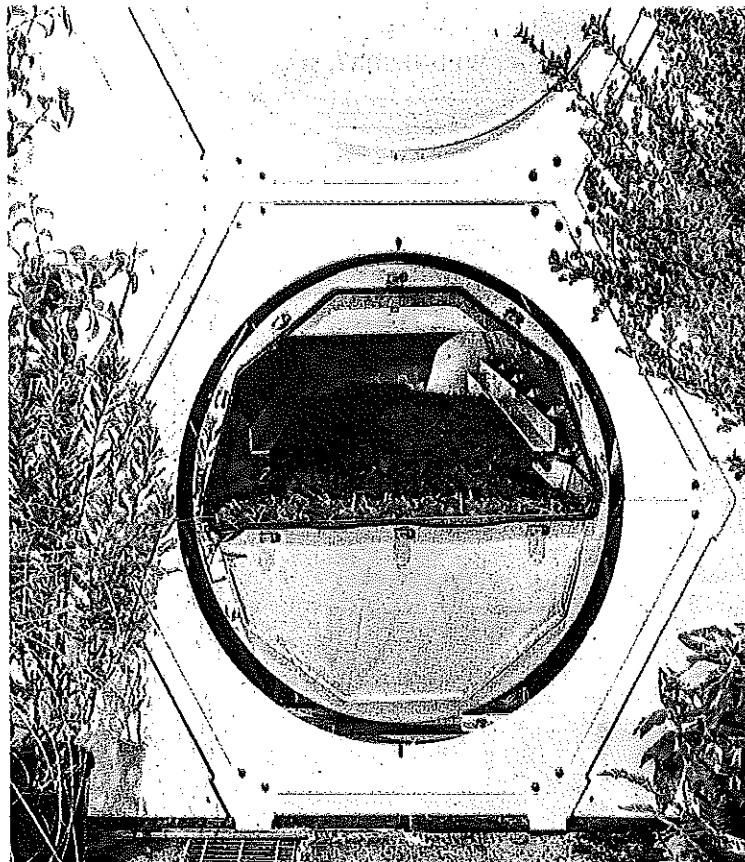
The bill to make Connecticut the seventh state to legalize “terrimation” will not advance this year, co-sponsor Rep. Christine Palm, D-Chester, said Monday. Instead, a working group will be formed to iron out technicalities and satisfy concerns of the state Vital Records Office, the Department of Public Health, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Palm said.

The idea behind the bill to legalize terrimation — a similar bill failed to advance in the General Assembly last year — co-sponsor Rep. Keith Denning, D-Wilton, said, is for the body “to decompose exactly the way it would be in nature. It’s just a way for the body to be returned to the earth.”

Denning, who will be 66 in May, said he and his wife, 70, want terrimation for their own remains.

Pioneered in Washington state, the method of turning a corpse into a cubic yard of earth involves wrapping the body in a biodegradable shroud and layering on wood chips, straw, flowers, and other plant material. The body is then placed into a bioreactor, where it is kept moist and warm with constant airflow to ensure aerobic decomposition.

Bacteria and fungi reduce flesh and bone to a rich, loamy soil. Artificial hips, implants, and other nonorganic materials are removed for recycling. The soil then is spread according to the wishes of the family and within limits of applicable state law. The Connecticut bill says the composted body “shall be disposed of through the scattering of such remains in a designated scattering garden or area in a cemetery,” or in a grave, crypt, or niche. Once remains



Sabel Roizen/Recompose/Contributed photo

Terrimation, or human composting, consists of placing bodies in metal containers with organic materials to trigger the natural process of decomposition. This practice is being considered with a new bill in Connecticut.

are handed over to loved ones, however, enforcing where they are scattered will be difficult to enforce, Denning acknowledged.

“I would hope that they not use them for their tomato garden,” he said, but added, “I think people should be able to do what they want with the remains of their loved ones.”

State agency officials’ concerns, Palm

said, involved the six to eight weeks it takes to reduce a body by terrimation. The officials were not balking at the intent of the law, she said, but rather, they had legitimate concerns, including questions about possession of the body during the process, and wanted to make sure that “all important considerations have been dealt with.” She noted the difference in time between cremation, in which remains are quickly

processed and given back to the family, and the much lengthier organic reduction process.

“People were a little bit concerned about making sure that we’re clearing the way legally for who handles that body for that amount of time,” she said.

The working group on terrimation is to make recommendations to lawmakers, who will take up a bill to make the method legal again next year, Palm said.

A public hearing on the original bill was held last week. Cathy Ludlum of Manchester told lawmakers that she is a dedicated recycler and buys most of her clothing second-hand. But Ludlum said terrimation is stomach-turning and opens the door to commercialization of human bodies for agricultural uses.

“To me,” Ludlum testified, according to legislative records, “bodies need to be treated with reverence, as they have once held a precious human life. The idea of turning our loved ones into fertilizer and mulch sickens me.”

“We are dealing with a profound devaluation of human dignity when we treat the human body in this manner, even if some people willingly consent to it,” Stephen Mendelsohn of New Britain testified. Any provision against using the remains as commercial fertilizer would be unenforceable, Mendelsohn testified.

“Will we be compelled to become unwitting existential cannibals, unable to know if we are consuming produce tainted with human compost? ‘Soylent Green’ is no longer futuristic — it is here now,” he said, referring to the 1973 science fiction film in which the bodies of people who die on a polluted, overpopulated Earth are converted to food for the living.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine issued a statement last year opposing terrimation.

“The body is not something that is used temporarily by the soul as a tool and that can ultimately be discarded as no longer useful,” the bishops wrote. “Jesus Christ

Terrimation continues on 4

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Wednesday, March 13, the 74th day of 2024. There are 293 days left in the year.

Today’s highlight in history:

On **March 13, 2013**, Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina was elected pope, choosing the name Francis. He was the first pontiff from the Americas and the first from outside

Europe in more than a millennium.

On this date:

In **1781**, the seventh planet of the solar system, Uranus, was discovered by Sir William Herschel.

In **1862**, President Abraham Lincoln signed a measure prohibiting Union military officers from returning fugitive

slaves to their owners.

In **1925**, the Tennessee General Assembly approved a bill prohibiting the teaching of the theory of evolution. (Gov. Austin Peay signed the measure on March 21; Tennessee repealed the law in 1967.)

In **1938**, famed attorney Clarence S. Darrow died in Chicago.

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DONUTS

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The Whole Donut location on Enfield Street became the last one in Connecticut after a Canton shop closed in March 2023. Enfield once had two Whole Donut shops, on Enfield Street and at 309 Hazard Ave.

King Donuts, which also has locations at 467 Hartford Road in Manchester and 1165 Main St. in East Hartford, serves coffee and doughnuts along with ad-

ditional food such as breakfast sandwiches.

It offers 12 coffee flavors including toasted almond, hazelnut, French vanilla, and buttered rum. The bakery has various bagels, muffins, croissants, and cinnamon rolls, as well as 37 kinds of doughnuts. Made-to-order breakfast sandwiches of egg, cheese, bacon, and sausage are served on a croissant, hard roll, English muffin, or bagel.

King Donuts is open daily from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m.



The newly opened King Donuts on Enfield Street in Enfield, seen here Monday, takes the place of the Whole Donut.

Jim Michaud/
Hearst
Connecticut
Media

WORKERS

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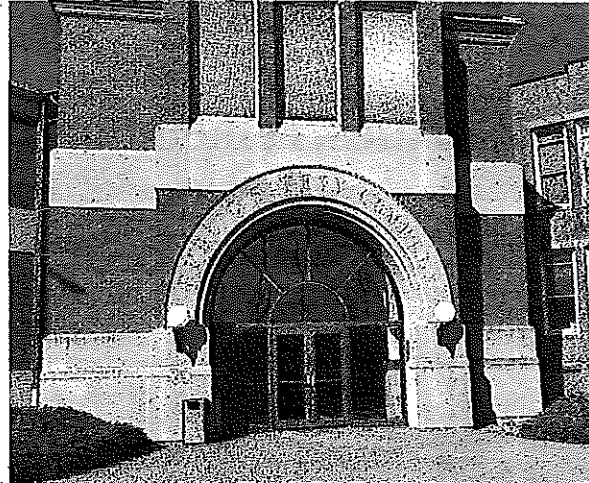
The top 10 earners were all police and firefighters. They were:

- Police Lt. Steven Camp, \$200,358
 - Police Patrol Officer Joseph Ficacelli, \$187,203
 - Fire Lt. Michael Transue, \$186,880
 - Fire Marshal John Pelow, \$182,838
 - Police Patrol Officer Michael Weglarz, \$180,775
 - Police Lt. John Dupont, \$179,660
 - Police Lt. Paolo Neves, \$175,512
 - Police Patrol Officer Krzysztof Gorinski, \$174,047
 - Police Sgt. Darrell Drouin, \$170,425
 - Former police chief Scott Sansom, \$170,302
- McCaw, who ranked 13th in total compensation at \$169,843,

said that overall salaries make up about 70 percent of the total amount of pay, with overtime making up the remaining 30 percent. Fire Chief Kevin Munson ranked 23rd in compensation. Former Mayor Michael Walsh was near the bottom of the \$100,000 club with a total compensation of \$104,474.

Assistant Corporation Counsel Richard Gentile had the highest combined retirement and part-time pay with \$109,464. His total compensation was \$169,464. Camp was second in overtime with \$102,042, and Weglarz was third with \$102,024 in overtime pay.

By department, the police department led the way in annual wages at \$13.2 million and \$4.45 million in overtime and payouts. The fire department spent \$11 million in wages and \$4.48 million in overtime and payouts, and the department of public works spent \$4.42 million in wages and \$563,000 in



Steven Goode/Hearst Connecticut Media

Employees of the East Hartford police and fire departments were the highest paid employees in the town in 2023, based on total compensation, including overtime.

overtime and payouts.

East Hartford Mayor Connor Martin said Monday that the majority of the costs of run-

ning a town goes to employees

because they are the ones providing the services, especially Town Hall, police, fire, and public works. "In regard to salaries over \$100,000, those are predominately police department and public safety, as well as middle- and upper-management positions. For police, there is often a direct link to the amount of overtime," Martin said. "With that said, we are currently balancing staffing and trying to get it up to a level that meets the demand, in order to cut down on overtime as a reactionary measure."

Martin added that management salaries are in line with job descriptions, responsibilities, authority, and accountability.

"These department leaders are making decisions, setting the vision, and executing strategy that requires a high level of skill, competency, and education," Martin said. "With that said, all of our salaries are competitive and aligned with what other municipalities are paying their staff in similar positions."

TERRAMATION

From page 2

has promised that one day, at the Final Resurrection, the souls of the dead will be reunited with their bodies."

"The end result of the human composting process is also disconcerting," the bishops' committee found, "for there is nothing left but compost, nothing that one can point to and identify as remains of the body ... There is nothing distinguishably left of

the body to be placed in a casket or an urn and laid to rest in a sacred place where Christian faithful can visit for prayer and remembrance."

Supporters of the proposed law, however, testified that natural organic reduction is good for the ailing planet, producing no carbon emissions as in cremation or taking up resources and space for burials. Lori Brown, executive director of the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters, told lawmakers that embalming chemicals pose a toxic danger to

soil, air, and water and that a single cremation can emit more than 500 pounds of carbon dioxide.

The Connecticut Funeral Directors Association supported the bill, subject to professional practices of funeral homes and crematories and state regulations, according to testimony by its legislative chair, Jonathan L. Green.

More alternatives to traditional burial and cremation have emerged, including "green burial," in which the body is interred without embalming, concrete, or

non-biodegradable caskets; mushroom suits, which are made of cotton seeded with mushroom spores and meant to break down the body and remove toxins while nourishing the earth; and aquamation, which uses an alkaline water solution to break down the body. Another available method turns cremated remains into stones.

Costs for terramation vary, but the process runs roughly \$5,000. Some families can't take all the soil and donate it to environmental restoration projects. One ter-

ramation-focused funeral home in Washington state uses the soil to help restore clear-cut temperate rainforests on a forest preserve.

Denning and Palm, who both said they were raised in the Catholic church, cited the same scripture (Genesis 3:19) to counter church leaders' objections to terramation: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."