



# FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

P.O. Box 994 ♦ Greenfield, MA 01302-0994 ♦ (413) 376-4747  
www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org

NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025

## The FCAWM Welcomes Speaker Dina Stander

### CAN WE TALK?

#### STARTING A CONVERSATION ABOUT DEATH

Conversations about death are hard, but communicating your wishes, or getting to know the wishes of a loved one, is important. Come join us to learn about ways to talk to your loved ones about death, dying and funeral plans.



**Dina Stander**

writer ~ end of life navigator ~ coach

**October 5<sup>th</sup> 2025, 2-4PM**

Annual meeting and program of the  
Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Mass  
at the Rockridge Community Center  
23-37 Coles Meadow Rd. Northampton, MA

**This program is FREE!**

Email [fcawmass@gmail.com](mailto:fcawmass@gmail.com)  
to register for in-person or Zoom

Presented by The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Mass  
[www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org](http://www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org)

### ***Why is this talk so important?***

Do you know what your loved ones would wish for their funeral arrangements? Do they know YOUR preferences? Would they know what to do if you died suddenly or became seriously ill, or if you or they were unable to communicate? Perhaps you simply wish to AVOID broaching this delicate subject. Drawing from her years of experiences, Dina Stander will share stories and tactics for starting and navigating the discussion with those who care for us.

To learn more about our speaker, please see page 3.

We kindly ask FCAWM members and members of the general public to register in advance (by Saturday October 4<sup>th</sup>). Email [fcawmass@gmail.com](mailto:fcawmass@gmail.com) and let us know if you prefer Zoom access or if you will attend in-person. Thank you!

Door prizes and refreshments will be available in the room. A brief business meeting will precede the program. All are welcome to attend and learn more about the FCAWM's recent activities.

# Your Vote Matters to Us

## 2025 Annual Meeting Timeline:

2:00pm - Welcome!

Refreshments hosted by Eileen and David Pratt

2:10pm - Annual Membership Meeting

Brief reports and election of board members

Door Prize Drawing #1

2:30pm - Program

Guest speaker Dina Stander

3:30pm - Q & A with Dina Stander

Refreshments and Door Prize Drawing #2

4:00pm - Adjourn

Please come to our Annual Meeting to cast your vote for our slate of officers and candidates for the board of trustees! We have a good leadership team, but there is still room for new volunteers. It is healthy for our board of trustees to add new voices, and the best time is now, in our annual election process. Please consider whether YOU would like to be a candidate to join this team.

We are a flexible group covering many different roles. This October we anticipate some shifts in responsibilities. We will thank Joan Pillsbury for her long tenure as Treasurer (2014-2025); we are glad she intends to continue on the board, at least for a year. Cecile Richard (a trustee since 2015, President 2019-2021) is our candidate for Treasurer. Jim Couchon, current President, agrees to serve again, assisted by Sandy Ward (former President, ongoing webmaster, current VP). Alex Tinari, elected 2023 as trustee and Secretary, will continue as Secretary for the next year in addition to managing a demanding new full-time job.

Our newest trustee, Pamela Shad (elected 2024), helps actively with outreach in the Berkshires and contributes her energy and organizational talents on many of our working committees. All of us take turns, one month at a time, responding to voice mails left on our help line and responding to email requests. We've been operating with only six trustees this year and would much prefer to have a full 9-person board.

We are delighted to welcome new candidate Kara Ribeiro, who attended one of Sandy's outreach talks this summer and recently joined FCAWM. We have openings for two additional trustees. On October 5th, at the Annual Meeting, before the election, we'll call for nominations from the floor (including from Zoom) for candidates. Qualifications? FCAWM membership and willingness to serve. It is OK to nominate yourself. Come join us. No travel required; we meet monthly by Zoom, and can communicate by email, phone, and/or text.

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Sandy Ward, Jim Couchon,  
Pamela Shad

The FCA of Western Massachusetts is a non-sectarian, all-volunteer, non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting a consumer's right to choose a meaningful, dignified and affordable funeral or memorial service.

## Speaker's Bio

Dina Stander is a Writer, End-of-Life Navigator and Coach. She is a graduate of the College of Public and Community Service and the University Without Walls at the University of Massachusetts. She has a B.A. in mediation and conflict resolution. As a ULC minister and certified Life-Cycle Celebrant, she serves individuals and families throughout New England and beyond.

Dina has also worked with elders to support aging at home, and in health education modeling self-management of chronic illness and pain, with additional training in home funeral support. She is the chief instigator at [Last Dance Shrouds](#), a custom burial shroud maker.

## Woven Connections

*By Sandy Ward*



While attending the national FCA conference in North Carolina in June 2025, I watched a woman unload woven caskets from a van. These are handmade works of art! I had already heard of a weaver of willow caskets in western Massachusetts and knew that we had a link to her business on our FCAWM website. Maybe I was seeing hers?

I continued watching the unloading process, curious to learn the source of these caskets. When I asked if these came from Massachusetts, the woman turned to me with a huge smile and proudly proclaimed that she, Sarah Lasswell (photo above), had made them herself, and had learned to do so in Massachusetts from Mary Lauren Fraser!

Would YOU like to learn about the weaving of willow caskets?

Visit <https://www.fraserbaskets.com/learning> for a list of upcoming classes with Mary Lauren Fraser, who has been teaching basketry and willow weaving for nine years.

# Our Educational Outreach

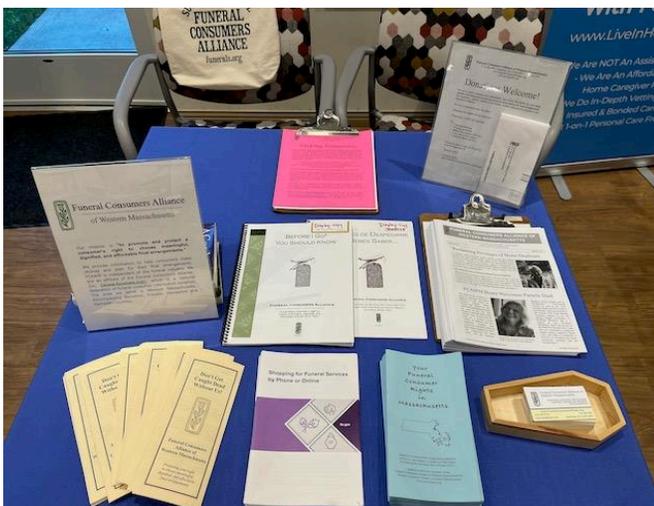
Volunteers from the FCAWM continue to provide opportunities for community members to learn more about options and rights to meaningful and affordable final arrangements. From January through September 2025, we have participated in 19 talks and community information fairs. We have at least five more engagements booked before year end. We provide an informal environment for attendees to ask questions or expand on topics of concern. We share educational handouts and show what resources are available. In addition, our website is accessible 24/7 for people to explore at their convenience, including a price comparison table and a directory of local funeral homes.

With the help of Pamela and Alex, from Berkshire and Hampshire counties respectively, we have increased our outreach in western communities.

In addition to public appearances, our volunteers monitor and respond to phone messages and email requests.



Cecile Richard speaks with State Representative Homar Gomez at the South Hadley COA



Typical table set-up at recent information fair

We are happy to answer questions. If we don't know the answer right away, we will consult others or make referrals. You can call at any hour to leave a message. A volunteer will retrieve the message and call back as soon as practical. We aim to respond within a day or two.

We offer our services freely to the public, but rely on donations from our membership to fund the overhead costs for our phone line, website, newsletters and brochures. We are grateful for your tax-deductible donations that enable us to be here helping people.

# Endswell Tour

by Sandy Ward

On June 27, 2025, FCAWM President Jim Couchon and I toured the Endswell Funeral Home in Hillsboro, NC, to see an aquamation machine. We were delighted to meet the young owners, Hunter and Veronica Beattie, and to hear their story on how they decided to offer water cremation (a.k.a. alkaline hydrolysis) services to their community.

The photo at right is Hunter showing us the big apparatus that accomplishes gentle water-based dissolution of a human body, using an alkaline solution, heat, and water pressure.



We were also impressed by the bright and welcoming reception area where they display unique urns made by local artists. Veronica actively encourages local artists to create the urns. She “curates” the gallery with several examples of urns from each of twenty different artists who work in media such as ceramic, hardwood, and even felt.

The photo at left shows our tour group and about half of the urn display shelves.

We learned much about the low ecological impact of this alkaline hydrolysis process.

We also learned about the Beatties’ community outreach. Since opening in 2023, Hunter has designed classes for continuing education credits for hospice nurses and social workers on aquamation and green burial and how to work with funeral homes. He and Veronica also use their space to host death cafes and meditation classes. They have grown their business to handle over 250 water cremations in 2024 and plan to enter into arrangements with other funeral homes looking to offer this service. This process is not yet permissible in Massachusetts. Hunter suggests that if we are interested in this process, we could reach out to local funeral homes to see whether they would partner with the nearest out-of-state provider or if they would help lobby with the Massachusetts legislature to advocate for its approval in our state.

We appreciated this opportunity to visit Endswell and learn of their services. We thank the national Funeral Consumers Alliance for making the arrangements in connection with the Biennial FCA Conference held in Cary, N.C., June 26-29, 2025. Jim and I attended that conference and are very glad that we signed up for the optional bus trip to Endswell.

# Frequently Asked Questions

By Pamela Shad

Q

**What is the difference between organ/tissue donation and whole body donation?**

A

The type of anatomical donation we are all probably most familiar with is deceased organ and tissue donation. That is when a person indicates on their driver license that upon their death, they would like any viable parts of the body to be donated and used to help other individuals. In this type of donation, time is of the essence. For certain organs, such as a heart, it may only be hours before the organ is no longer viable for transplant. If you are considering this type of donation, in addition to registering through your RMV, you can register with OrganDonor.gov or National Donate Life Registry at RegisterMe.org. At time of death, an organ procurement organization (OPO) in your area will facilitate the donation process. After donation, the donor is taken to a funeral home, and the OPO works with the funeral director to honor the donor's and donor family's funeral wishes. An open casket funeral is possible after organ donation.

In whole body donation your body is donated to a medical school or research institution. There is a larger window of time after death that the body remains viable, about 24-48 hrs. Donating your body helps medical students to learn human anatomy hands-on or could help surgeons develop and improve surgical techniques and assist in the development of life-saving medicines and surgical procedures.

If you are considering whole body donation, it is important to register with the medical school or research institution **in advance**. Even if you have indicated these wishes in your advance directives or your will, some medical schools will not accept your body if you had not pre-registered. At time of death, next of kin should notify the institution (not funeral home) to arrange for pickup. After the body is used for teaching or research, it is cremated; the ashes may then be buried or returned to the family. Expenses are covered as part of the donation, making whole body donation the least expensive option for the disposition of your remains.

Note: The circumstances of your death will affect what donations can be made. It is OK to accept all donation options. Medical schools advise having a plan B in case for some reason (infectious illness?) they cannot take your body.

Whatever you choose for your after-death plans, the most important element is **to discuss your plans and wishes with your family, friends, or funeral agent**. Having this conversation is often difficult. If you would like some help with how to begin, please join us Sunday afternoon October 5, when our featured speaker, Dina Stander, will share her experience on how start the conversation. (See page 1 for details.)

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**Donations welcome!** Please make checks payable to FCAWM and send to P. O. Box 994, Greenfield, MA 01302-0994.

Or donate ONLINE by credit card or e-check: [funeralconsumerswmass.org/donate/](https://funeralconsumerswmass.org/donate/)

Contributions are tax-deductible. We are a 501(c)(3) organization.

\_\_\_ YES! I want to renew support for the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts and its mission of promoting and protecting a consumer's right to choose meaningful, dignified, and affordable final arrangements. \_\_\_\$15 \_\_\_\$30 \_\_\_\$50 \_\_\_\$100 or \$\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I'm NEW. Please enroll me and send the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner and membership package. (Suggested new member donation is \$30.) I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Please send me \_\_\_ copies of the "Before I Go, You Should Know" planner. I am enclosing \$ \_\_\_\_\_ as a donation to reimburse FCAWM for the expenses of acquiring and mailing the spiral-bound planner. (Suggested minimum \$15 per copy.)

\_\_\_ I have time and interest in helping FCAWM. Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Prefer to receive newsletters via email? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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## NEWS OF ALTERNATIVE DISPOSITIONS

Georgia and Minnesota have now legalized **Natural Organic Reduction** (NOR, a.k.a., human composting). **NOR** is now legal in 14 US States (Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, Georgia, Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, and Maine). The National Funeral Directors Association keeps an updated list indicating the dates of legalization; see

<https://nfda.org/resources/alternative-disposition/natural-organic-reduction> .

NOTE: Legalization is a first step. It opens the door to the possibility that NOR services could be offered in the state. There may be delays in establishing state regulations, and then a period of waiting for providers of NOR to open for business.

**Alkaline Hydrolysis** (AH, a.k.a. water cremation) is now legal in nearly half of all US States (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Maine, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, West Virginia, Maryland, Connecticut, Vermont), and in five Canadian provinces (Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland), as well as in the United Kingdom, some Australian states, and South Africa). For more information, see <https://nfda.org/resources/alternative-disposition/alkaline-hydrolysis> .

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**NOTE: Please notify us if you change your address, wish to unsubscribe, or wish to change your preference (electronic vs. print) for our newsletters (2 per year). Call 413-376-4747 or email [fcawmass@gmail.com](mailto:fcawmass@gmail.com). THANK YOU!**