

DEATH WITH DIGNITY

Bill: H7100

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Position: SUPPORT

Chair Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thirty years ago a small group of committed Oregon citizens wrote the ballot measure and ran the campaign to pass the nation's first Death with Dignity law. Our organization started just after passage of that measure and we have worked for more than three decades to help amplify the voices of terminally ill patients across the country who know that someday they may wish to use the option of medical aid in dying(MAID).

Today, a group of Rhode Island citizens and dedicated legislators have come together to ask this Legislature to pass a Rhode Island version of medical aid in dying with H7100, the Lila Manfield Sapinsley Compassionate Care Act.

This proposed law, like all other Death with Dignity laws currently in place, requires four key cornerstones:

1. The patient must be diagnosed with a terminal disease with a prognosis of less than six months to live, verified by two physicians.
2. The patient must be capable of making their own health care decisions.
3. The patient must be acting voluntarily and is required to submit multiple requests orally and in writing to confirm their intention to use the law.
4. The patient must self-administer the medication. Lethal injection, mercy killing, or euthanasia are specifically outlawed and there are criminal penalties for fraud, coercion, or forgery.

In addition, the proposed law establishes a process that has stood the test of time in ensuring that only those who meet the criteria above are able to access and use this option. The process includes multiple oral and written requests, waiting periods, mental health evaluations, consultation with the primary physician, and information about other available end-of-life options,including hospice and palliative care.

Over the past 30 years, there have been dozens of studies in well respected medical publications that have shown the efficacy of this process and the great relief these laws provide to people in the final stages of their lives. Dozens of those studies can be found here: <https://deathwithdignity.org/resources/peer-review-articles/>. These studies clearly show the process works and provides great comfort to those who are dying, whether they use the law or not.

Additionally, research shows that in states where Death with Dignity laws are enacted, hospice enrollment and palliative care increases. State reports show that over 85% of people using this law are enrolled in hospice care (<https://deathwithdignity.org/resources/state-report-navigator/>). MAID and hospice care, along with proper pain control, are all key elements in allowing terminally ill patients to die on their own terms.

Today, over 73.5 million people live in states where MAID is legal. And two states – Oregon and Vermont – have removed residency requirements, in effect making Death with Dignity legal for everyone in the U.S.

Enacting this law in Rhode Island will codify the rights of terminally ill people to make their own end-of-life decisions, free from government intervention and free from the religious beliefs of those who oppose this law. For indeed, the enduring opposition to Death with Dignity comes from the Catholic Church hierarchy that has long attempted to force its religious views on the entire population. This proposed law respects the sanctity of the relationship between a patient and their physician by leaving the religious views of others outside of the doctor's office.

Finally, we remind the committee that H7100 is voluntary and people will choose for themselves whether or not to avail themselves of this end-of-life option. H7100 includes clear and effective opt-out provisions clearly stating no patient, medical professional, or hospital organization can be required or forced to participate.

Allowing terminally ill patients on the verge of death the autonomy to make their own end-of-life decisions is consistent with the beliefs of Rhode Island citizens, and we urge you to pass H7100, to recognize and honor the rights of your terminally ill citizens.

We urge your yes vote on H7100.
Thank you.