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Readfield
LD 613

Testimony for LD 613: An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients

Honorable Health and Human Services Committee members, my name is Cynthia Cushing, and I am here today to offer my strong support for LD 613. This bill addresses a critical flaw in the current Maine Death with Dignity Act, namely the mandatory 17-day waiting period.

I have seen firsthand the negative component of this Bill in its current form; in December 2024 a family member did not have the option to die with dignity because they did not have enough time to find a physician who aligns with this as an option for end of life choices and/or secure the necessary approval to engage in this option. It was heartbreaking to watch him wither away in the hospital, and then in hospice, for almost three weeks while the cancer overtook him. While I am grateful that Death with Dignity is an option in Maine, I look forward to the possibility of improving the law to allow easier access for those in need of its services.

For the record, Death with Dignity is a peaceful, self-imposed, end-of-life option for patients who are determined terminally ill with six months or less to live by a medical professional. Death with Dignity is NOT euthanasia, assisted suicide, or mercy killing¹.

The current legislation imposes an arbitrary administrative delay after a patient has already met rigorous qualification requirements. These requirements, as we know, necessitate physicians to exercise their clinical judgment and expertise in several crucial areas: Determining a patient's terminal illness; assessing a prognosis of six months or less; evaluating a patient's decisional capacity; and confirming a patient's physical ability to self-ingest medication.

We entrust our physicians with these complex and deeply sensitive decisions, relying on their professional expertise to guide patient care. Yet, after these rigorous assessments, the current law demands a 17-day waiting period; a pause that disregards the very clinical judgment we so highly value.

LD 613 seeks to rectify this inconsistency. It proposes to grant physicians the authority to exercise their clinical judgment and expertise in determining whether a time waiver is appropriate for their patients. This is not about hastening the process, but about ensuring that patients, who have been deemed qualified, can access the aid-in-dying medication in a timely manner, especially when their condition dictates urgency.

The current mandatory waiting period can cause unnecessary suffering and anxiety for patients who are already facing the end of their lives. This bill is a matter of compassion and respect for patient autonomy. It allows physicians to provide the best possible care, tailored to the unique needs of each individual. It is about ensuring that the Maine Death with Dignity Act truly serves its purpose: to provide a dignified and compassionate option for qualified patients. Therefore, I urge you to support LD 613 and empower physicians to fully utilize their clinical discretion in the care of their patients. Thank you.

1. Death With Dignity. (n.d.). Death with dignity: Frequently asked questions. <https://deathwithdignity.org/wpcontent/uploads/2021/12/Death-with-Dignity-FAQs-101619.pdf>

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