

Anne Hallward
Saco
LD 613

Testimony of Anne Hallward, MD, In Support of LD 613: An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients

Presented by Representative Meyer before the Health and Human Services Committee, April 11, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Dr. Anne Hallward. I live in Saco, and practice in Portland. I am in support of LD 613 as a physician and as a family member caring for my father at the end of his life.

I am testifying because I know that when a person who is very sick, summons up the energy to request and go through the death with dignity evaluation process, they are clear that they are ready, this is important to them, and they need their suffering to end. It would be terribly unfortunate if a patient is denied this relief of suffering because their doctor was unable to give them their prescription in time, because of an required waiting period.

The doctors who evaluate patients for death with dignity, are very careful to make sure the patient has the capacity to make the decision now. It must be clear and necessary. Why then would we want to make someone suffer for 17 more days if they are already qualified, and can fill out their written request while being witnessed now? For some, the waiting period is helpful, so they can get their affairs in order, and say their goodbyes. But if a person is suffering, or their condition is worsening, or a brain tumor is putting their decision-making capacity at risk, then the doctor should have the right to waive the waiting period.

When we make a patient wait for 17 days, we are also asking the family to be on call that whole time, and the likelihood goes up that some of them will miss the chance to be present when their loved one is dying. One of the gifts of Death with Dignity, is that the family knows when it will be happening and can be present when their loved one is dying. This can be one of the most loving, sacred, and beautiful moments they will ever share.

When I was in medical school being trained in hospice, I witnessed firsthand the power of being present when a loved one is dying. The families thanked me profusely for supporting them as they stayed at the bedside together. These are memories that will last a lifetime. When my own father died, I was there with three siblings and my mother, holding him, singing to him, telling him how much we loved him. It is a cherished memory. He was at peace, and his suffering had finally come to an end. Granting death with dignity not only relieves suffering, it invites the family to come together and be present at the moment of death. A required waiting period can rob a family of this shared and loving experience.

This is about compassion. As a doctor, it is my first duty to relieve suffering. I ask that you join with me, to support those individuals who are suffering and dying so that we can reduce their pain by granting them access to death with dignity as soon as their doctor determines it is safe.

Please give your unanimous support to this very simple change to the Death with Dignity law so that doctors can waive the waiting period after the patient is qualified, and the decision will relieve suffering for both the patient and their family. Thank you.