

Jennifer Webber
Biddeford
LD 613

Testimony in support of L.D. 613, "An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients," sponsored by Representative Michele Meyer.

April 10, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Maine State Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Jennifer Webber. I live in Biddeford, Maine. Please accept my testimony supporting L.D. 613, "An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients."

A close relative in Maine died in October 2023 with Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) medications. For years, she had suffered with heart and lung disease. Her health took a sharp turn in the spring and summer of 2023. Her symptoms became untreatable, and in August of 2023 at age 81, she was told she had less than six months to live. She immediately went into hospice care at home. Her health was declining rapidly. Breathing, especially, was becoming increasingly difficult for her.

My relative had been a MAID/Death with Dignity supporter for decades and had had in-depth discussions with her doctors over many years. Because of this, she was prepared to start the MAID application process right away upon receiving her terminal diagnosis. That helped her make it through the process and be qualified for MAID in time ... before she lost her mental faculties and physical abilities that would have disqualified her. In my opinion, it was close. She was nearing the point where she would not be approved due to mental decline, and where she would lose her physical ability to take the MAID medications, which must be self-administered. She was in significant discomfort that was on the verge of becoming unbearable, and I worried more and more each day that, because of the waiting periods, she would miss the window of availing herself of the MAID option she had believed in for so long.

On a beautiful Maine autumn day in October 2023, my relative took the MAID prescription and died peacefully, surrounded by her kids and her beloved dog. As sad as it was to say goodbye, I honestly was relieved for her that she was finally at peace and did not have to continue to suffer. Because of my relative's experience, I do worry for other dying patients that the waiting period in current law will cause them more and worse suffering, and, in some cases, the delay caused by the waiting period will prevent a patient's approval and/or ability to take the meds. That would be tragic.

I strongly support LD 613. Many people already know their wishes if they are ever given a terminal prognosis and have had conversations with their doctors and loved ones about their wishes. In any case, a patient's doctors are the best-equipped people to both qualify a patient for MAID and determine whether a waiting period should be waived. In my relative's case, the waiting period was an additional stressor at an already very difficult time.

My family is thankful for Maine's Death with Dignity law. I encourage all Maine legislators to make it stronger and more accessible for qualified patients by supporting L.D. 613.

Thank you for your consideration, with special thanks to Rep. Michele Meyer for sponsoring this important amendment.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Webber
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