

Personal testimony of support for LD 613

Good morning members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Dr Mark Wrona, I live in Falmouth, and I am a palliative medicine and hospice physician. I have been specializing in palliative care and hospice for the past 17 years, and the last 12 years have been with the largest community oncology program in Maine, New England Cancer Specialists. I lead a team of 9 clinicians providing palliative care to patients with advanced cancer and blood disorders at 4 clinical sites, 3 of which are in Maine: Kennebunk, Westbrook, and Topsham.

I support LD 613, An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients. I have been participating as an attending physician for LD 1313 the Maine Death with Dignity Act since it became law September 19, 2019. I choose to participate as an attending physician out of respect for my patient's autonomy when facing a terminal disease. Over the past 5 ½ years I have shepherded over 300 patients through the process to obtain access to medical aid in dying medications. The majority have been fortunate enough to get through the 17 day process. I never fail to be impressed by the relief this provides my patients due to the control it provides them over when they may end their life. They seek a peaceful and dignified end to their life.

However, there is a flaw to LD 1313 in the lengthy time it takes to complete the process. I understand it acts as a safe guard for patients, but for some patients 17 days is a tortuous period of time, and an unnecessary barrier to a peaceful death. Not all patients have the time to get through the 17 days, and access death with dignity medications. LD 613 is necessary to improve the law, and relieve suffering for these individuals. I believe physicians are best empowered to make the judgment when the waiting period should be waived. In my experience, I expect it to only be necessary for a minority of my patients, but these are an important and desperate group craving peace and dignity at the end of their lives.

I believe this amendment will allow physicians to make time-sensitive and medically appropriate decisions to prevent needless suffering and ensure dignified and compassionate end of life care. My patients voice to me on a daily basis that they want access to death with dignity, and this amendment will improve their access.

I am thankful to Representative Michele Meyer, and Senator Marianne Moore for sponsoring and co-sponsoring LD 613. I urge the members of the committee to vote in favor of this amendment.

I am thankful to the committee for the opportunity to provide my testimony. I would be willing to answer any questions you may have of me.