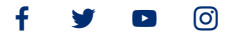


This is a cache of <http://legislativegazette.com/physicians-group-endorses-medical-aid-in-dying/> as retrieved on Friday, September 15, 2017.



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Physician's group endorses medical aid-in-dying legislation

Written by [JAMIE FANDL](#), Gazette staff writer on July 25, 2017

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Photo courtesy of Compassion & Choices

Last week, the New York State Academy of Family Physicians, which represents over 6,000 physicians and medical students throughout the state, voted in favor of supporting the New York State's Medical Aid in Dying Act (S.3151/A.2383). The bill,



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which the NYSAFP previously held a neutral stance on, would allow for a terminally ill patient to request the use of medication for aid in dying.

The members of Compassion and Choices New York, a nonprofit organization committed to improving medical care and expanding choice at the end of life, are thrilled with the NYSAFP's vote in support of the bill. The organization's campaign director Corinne Carey applauded their decision last Monday.

"This exciting news demonstrates that the medical community is moving consistently and decisively to support medical aid in dying as a legitimate end-of-life option for all terminally ill, mentally capable New Yorkers, and an appropriate option for a small number of individuals and their families," Carey said. "The six-thousand-member NYS Academy of Family Physicians brings its expertise, high standing among medical professionals and enlightened leadership to the effort to authorize medical aid in dying as an option for New York. We thank the Academy and welcome their efforts on behalf of New Yorkers who overwhelmingly support medical aid in dying."

In more detail, the Medical Aid in Dying Act would serve to provide that a mentally competent, terminally ill patient may request medication to be self-administered for the purpose of hastening the patient's death. This would be to avoid further pain and suffering, and to offer the patient a peaceful death on their own terms. Moreover, the bill also provides that the patient's physician, when acting in good faith with the careful provisions of the law, would be protected from civil and criminal liability.

Much of the reason for this bill's support was highlighted by the death of Brittany Maynard, a young California woman with terminal brain cancer. She was an advocate for the legalization of medical aid in dying, which was not legal in California until 2016. In order to end her own suffering on her own terms, Maynard moved to Oregon, where medical aid in dying is legal.

The argument for the passing of this bill in New York State focuses on the desire of terminally ill patients, like Maynard, to determine for themselves how and when they die. Before the NYSAFP's vote, many polls conducted in New York showed the rest of the state's support for this legislation. A 2015 poll found that 77 percent of all New Yorkers support aid-in-dying.

After the NYSAFP vote, their President Dr. Sarah Nosal discussed the Academy's ultimate decision. "Family Physicians are unique in that we are blessed to care for patients and their families throughout the lifespan, quite literally from cradle to grave," Nosal said. "Supporting the authorization of medical aid in dying is commensurate with the Family Physician's desire to empower our patients not only in their pursuit of wellness, their management of chronic disease, but also the alleviation of suffering when faced with a terminal illness."

The NYSAFP have also cited a handful of reasons to support medical aid in dying. Among them they state that their position of neutrality on the matter can have negative consequences, and can be viewed as patient abandonment. On top of that, they cite the effect in Oregon after the state's implementation of its Death with Dignity law, which showed that end-of-life care was improved and rates of medical aid in dying showed no evidence of heightened risk for any vulnerable groups such as the disabled, elderly, poor, or uninsured.

Yet, not everyone in the state agrees with the implementation of assisted suicide options in New York. The New York Alliance Against Assisted Suicide is an informal association of many diverse organizations, institutions, agencies, and individuals in the state committed to preventing the legalization of assisted suicide. They argue against several facets of medical aid

in dying, some of which include the possibility of false terminal prognoses, the fact that a witness to a prescription request could be someone who would inherit from the patient, and the patient's ultimate consent at the time the medication is administered might not be a sure thing.

The association also argues that assisted suicide poses a threat to those living with disabilities, as pressure can be placed on those in such vulnerable circumstances to use this option. "Nothing in Oregon or Washington style laws can protect from explicit or implicit family pressures to commit suicide or personal fears of 'being a burden'," the association states. "There is also no requirement that a doctor evaluate family pressures the patient may be under." Moreover, the association stresses that barbituates, which are the most common substances used for medical aid in dying, do not assure a peaceful death as there have been associated issues with their effects that can cause distress to the patient.

The New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedom, a Christian-based organization dedicated to influencing legislation in New York, also take issue with the prospect of this bill. "Physician-assisted suicide represents a complete abdication of our moral responsibility to persons suffering from terminal illnesses," their website states. "Rather than caring for such persons with the utmost sensitivity and compassion, the sponsors of this bill would have us simply expedite their demise."

Yet, despite opposition, this vote by the NYSAFP sheds light on the growing number of United States physicians who now endorse the idea of medical aid in dying. With their support, Compassion and Choices NY plans to continue educating New Yorkers about end-of-life options in their attempt to get this bill passed.

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