D.C. Council Holds First Hearing on Death with Dignity as New Poll Shows 67% Support in District

Washington Post Calls for District to Offer This Humane Option for Life’s End

District of Columbia, July 7, 2015— A poll released by Lake Research today shows 67 percent of District of Columbia residents (51 percent strongly) support the right of terminally ill adults with less than six months to live to legally obtain medication to end their lives. The findings were released as the District City Council’s Health and Human Services Committee met for the first time on the issue.

“The numbers come as no surprise,” said Peg Sandeen, Executive Director of Death with Dignity National Center, an advocacy organization. “National polls, too, show overwhelming—and growing—support for letting people make their own decisions about how to live their last days.”

Introduced in January 2015 by Councilmember Mary Cheh, D-Ward 3, and endorsed by The Washington Post last month, the Death with Dignity Act of 2015 would allow adult D.C. residents who have had two doctors confirm a terminal diagnosis to fill a prescription medication to end their lives in a peaceful and dignified manner at the time and place of their choosing.

A virtually identical law has been in place in Oregon since 1997. In 18 years, no significant problems have arisen, and it has been used relatively sparingly—only 1,327 times, with fully a third of those who successfully obtain a prescription opting not to use it.

“The Oregon law has been implemented carefully and worked exactly as intended for over 17 years,” Sandeen said. “The time is right for D.C. to adopt this law.”

At Councilmember Cheh’s request, the National Center helped draft, promote, and support the bill. “We’re pleased to see our decades of work continue in this historic Council hearing, as is happening in dozens of statehouses across the country. This is an important step toward providing District residents with the autonomy, freedom and peace of mind that has been a godsend in Oregon, Washington, and Vermont.”

Death with Dignity National Center is a 501(c)3, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization working to provide Death with Dignity as an option for dying individuals and to stimulate nationwide improvements in end-of-life care. The organization authored, passed, and defended the Oregon Death with Dignity Act (1994/1997/2006), was instrumental in passing the Washington (2008) and Vermont (2013) laws, and spearheaded the Maine (2000), Hawaii (2002), and Massachusetts (2012) campaigns. For more information, visit www.DeathwithDignity.org.