

Testimony in Support of HB 1659, the Death with Dignity Act

Before the New Hampshire House Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2020

Representative Smith, Representative Keans, members of the New Hampshire House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Peter Korchnak, and I am here to testify in support of HB 1659, the New Hampshire Death with Dignity Act. I represent the Death with Dignity National Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding end-of-life options across the U.S.

I want to share with you the experience from Oregon, which has successfully and flawlessly implemented the nation's first death with dignity law for over 23 years. We have seen similar outcomes in other states, including Washington, Vermont, California, Colorado, and Hawaii.

Like the bill before you, death with dignity laws are all about autonomy, offering a small number of adults who are terminally ill an additional voluntary medical option to control the timing and manner of their death.

As in your proposal, the Oregon law requires the qualifying patient to be an adult state resident, competent, and diagnosed by two physicians to be within six months of death from a terminal illness. The patient must also be able to take the medication themselves. The patient voluntarily requests the medication three times, with a written request witnessed by two people. The patient may change their mind at any time.

The Oregon law is used sparingly. One in three Oregonians choose not to use the prescription medication to end their life. And only four in one thousand deaths in Oregon are under this law. Any health care professional or institution may choose not to participate—and many do. Every physician, pharmacist, or health care provider potentially involved in this process may refuse to participate for any reason.

More importantly, a number of peer-reviewed, independent studies, including in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, have shown Oregon to have one of the highest rates in the country of hospice use and the number of people who die at home, as opposed to the hospital. Nine in ten Oregonians using the Death with Dignity Act are on hospice and die at home.

The passage of our law sent a signal that dying patients must receive better care and such that they control. With this and subsequent end-of-life policy changes, we improved how people die in Oregon.

Today you'll have heard a lot of allegations from opponents about what this bill does. In more than 40 years of combined experience in the states with laws like the Death with Dignity Act before you, not a single one of these claims has ever come to pass or been independently verified. Not in Oregon. Not in Washington. Not in Vermont. California. Colorado. Hawaii. Nowhere.

As in Oregon, enacting this law would provide one more option for New Hampshire residents at the end of their life.

Please vote yes on HB 1659, the New Hampshire Death with Dignity Act.

Thank you for your time.

Peter Korchnak
Advocacy Director
Death with Dignity National Center