

Assisted Suicide Bill Advances in Legislature

California lawmakers on Thursday revived a bill that would allow physician-assisted suicide in the most populous U.S. state, after a renewal of debate on end-of-life issues prompted by the death of 29-year-old Brittany Maynard last year.

The bill, which is being fought by numerous religious and medical organizations, would allow adults suffering from incurable illnesses that their doctors say will kill them within six months to request medication to end their lives.

It was approved by the state Senate appropriations committee days after the powerful California Medical Association dropped its opposition.

"We are one step closer to ensuring Californians have access to all options when they are facing the end of life," said Senator Lois Wolk, a Democrat who co-authored the bill.

Another co-author, Democratic state Senator Bill Monning, said the bill was inspired by the death of Maynard, who moved to Oregon from California so that she could commit suicide under that state's aid-in-dying law.

It was one of several bills that made it out of legislative limbo on Thursday, as lawmakers faced a June 5 deadline for passing bills out of at least one house. It now goes to the full Senate.

Also approved by committees in the Assembly and Senate were bills to allow high school students greater access to community college classes, legalize Internet poker and allow undocumented immigrants to purchase health insurance through the state's Covered California health insurance exchange if

the federal government approves.

Backers of the assisted suicide proposal made some changes to the bill to gain more support after it initially met with strong opposition from hospitals, doctors, anti-abortion organizations and disability rights groups.

As currently written, it allows hospitals and medical providers to refuse to comply with a patient's wish for assisted suicide, and also makes it illegal to pressure or manipulate people into ending their lives.

On May 20, the California Medical Association, which still opposes the concept of assisted suicide, removed its formal opposition to the bill.

The California ProLife Council, which opposed the bill, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday. But the organization, which opposes abortion, said on its website assisted suicide puts at risk people who are disabled or depressed.

"The medically dependent such as Alzheimer's patients; the depressed disabled; and other non-terminal have all been killed under 'assisted suicide' regimes," the organization said last month in a blog post.

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