

Belgian King Signs Child Euthanasia Into Law

The king of Belgium has signed into law a controversial bill making the nation the first country in the world to allow euthanasia for terminally ill children of all ages.

The bill became law despite widespread opposition, including a 200,000-strong Europe-wide petition, which was delivered to King Philippe last week, urging him not to sign the bill.

Belgian press reported that the king had signed the legislation into law on Sunday after it was passed by the Belgian parliament last month.

The bill passed by 86 votes to 44 with 12 abstentions, despite more than 160 Belgian pediatric doctors opposing the change.

Although the king's signature is needed in order for a bill to become law, it would have been highly unusual for the constitutional monarch to block a piece of legislation.

In 2002, Belgium became the second country in the world, after the Netherlands, to allow euthanasia.

More than 1,000 cases of euthanasia were reported in Belgium in 2011—a 4,620 percent rise since the practice was legalized in 2002.

A number of controversial cases involving patients who did not have a terminal illness have also been reported, including a case involving deaf twins who sought euthanasia after discovering they were both going blind.

Following Belgium's decision to introduce child euthanasia, Richard Hawkes, the chief executive of the U.K. disability charity Scope said lots of people in Britain, "not least disabled people ... are really worried at the way we seem to be

edging towards a change in the law.”

Hawkes also called for politicians to “guard against community bullying” of society’s “most vulnerable members” when the issue is discussed in the Westminster Parliament later this year.

A freelance journalist who has cerebral palsy spoke out recently in the *Times*, saying he may never have been alive if the Belgian law existed in Britain.

Alex Taylor’s parents were told by a doctor that he would “never think, let alone speak, read or write.”

“As it turned out, I studied history and politics at Warwick University and have been known to have a sense of humor,” he said.

“I do not blame the doctor,” he said. “People with a cerebral hemorrhage like mine are not supposed to buck the system.”

However, he continued, “I have wondered what might have crossed my parents’ minds had euthanasia been an option.”