

Dr. Kevorkian Would Celebrate as California Senate Buys Into Physician-Assisted Suicide Bill

The California Senate approved a physician-assisted suicide bill on Thursday that would allow some terminally ill patients to obtain medication to end their lives, even as opponents criticized the bill as dangerous.

California lawmakers unveiled the bill in January in an effort tearfully welcomed by a woman whose 29-year-old daughter, Brittany Maynard, moved from California to Oregon last year to end her life after she was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer.

Maynard became a high-profile advocate for assisted suicide before her death, and was featured on *People* magazine's cover.

The bill, which was approved 23-13 in the Senate, now moves on to the state Assembly, said Kathy Smith, a spokeswoman for Democratic Senator Bill Monning, one of the bill's sponsors.

If it becomes law in California, the most populous U.S. state would join Oregon, Washington state, Montana and Vermont in allowing some form of physician-assisted suicide.

The California legislation, which is modeled after an Oregon law, would allow adults suffering from incurable and irreversible illnesses that doctors say will kill them within six months to obtain medication that they could self-administer to end their lives.

Two separate physicians would be required to confirm a patient has six months or less to live and verify that the patient has

the mental competency to make healthcare decisions.

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

Participation by doctors and pharmacists would be voluntary, and the bill would make it a felony to pressure people into ending their lives or forging a request.

The bill got a boost last month after the California Medical Association dropped its three-decade opposition to physician-assisted suicide, changing its position to neutral, in the first such move by a state medical association.

“Californians with terminal diseases should have the autonomy to approach death on their own terms, and I look forward to continuing this policy discussion in the Assembly,” Senator Monning said in a statement.

Critics said they feared some patients might be steered toward assisted suicide if insurers deny or even delay coverage for costly life-sustaining medical treatments.

“Unfortunately this vote sends a message to people like me that suicide is a preferred option,” Stephanie Packer, 32, who was diagnosed with a terminal illness, said in a statement sent out by Californians Against Assisted Suicide.

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