

Should Ireland Give Marie Fleming the Right to Die?

An Irish woman who is terminally ill with multiple sclerosis made an impassioned plea in her battle to seek the lawful right to die at the start of a landmark case in Ireland's High Court on Tuesday.

"I've come to the court, whilst I still can use my speech, my voice, to ask you to assist me in having a peaceful, dignified death, to die peacefully, I need assistance," Marie Fleming, 58, said, giving evidence from a wheelchair to three senior judges.

Fleming, whose partner wiped away tears as she spoke, was unable to sit in the dock and the judges came down from their usual elevated positions to sit on the normal benches and hear her evidence.

Assisted suicide is illegal in overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Ireland, where the issue of amending its constitution was highlighted last month following the death of a woman who was refused an **abortion** of her dying fetus.

The debate over a person's 'right to die' has played out through high-profile court cases in Britain and former university lecturer Fleming, who is completely paralyzed, brought the first case of its kind in Ireland.

She is seeking to establish her partner of 18 years' legal right to help her die and described to the court in a clear and composed manner how her pain limit has reached an end.

Suicide was decriminalized in Ireland in 1993 but the ban on assisting another person to commit suicide remains in place and an accomplice to such an act could face a jail sentence of up to 14 years.

Fleming, who has two adult children, said she had talked the matter through with her partner and family and had planned every detail, including her funeral arrangements, where she wished for a wicker coffin, jazz music and her life to be celebrated.

"I totally feel undignified, I have ways of trying to cope with it but when you have to get showered and toileted and fed you begin to feel like a nobody," she said.

"We have talked about this non-stop, I think the only thing that is left for me to die is with the use of gas—by this I mean the usage of gas through a face mask," she said.

In Europe, assisted suicide is only permitted in Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Switzerland. It has been allowed in Switzerland since 1941 if aided by a non-physician who has no vested interest in the death.

In September, Switzerland's parliament voted against a bid to tighten rules, among the world's most liberal, on assisted suicide, rejecting concerns about foreigners receiving help to end their lives in the country.

A recent poll found that large majorities of west Europeans favor the legalization of assisted suicide, according to a new survey.

Assisted suicide is also legal in the U.S. states of Oregon and Washington. Three people all failed in their bids to win legal assistance to die in recent cases in Britain.

The case will continue until the end of next week.