

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2217

Before the Oregon House of Representatives Committee on Health Care
March 19, 2019

Thank you Committee Chair and members of the Committee. I am George Eighmey, former Oregon State Representative and Executive Director of the organization for twelve years that facilitated the implementation of Oregon's first in the nation's death with dignity law.

I am now the Board President of Death with Dignity National Center, the organization that is the outgrowth of the Right to Die group that drafted and assisted in the passages of our law.

Our organization opposes HB 2217 for the following reasons:

1. Our law was carefully and thoughtfully drafted in the 1990s to create a balance between providing the terminally ill with a humane and dignified option at the end of life and those vulnerable individuals who we believed must be provided safeguards and protections against pressures to use the law. During the 25 years the law has been in effect this delicate balance has been scrupulously maintained. HB 2217, in our opinion and experience, will shift the balance against the vulnerable by permitting use of devices that others may use against the terminally ill person's wishes. It also creates the potential for euthanasia to be used when our law specifically prohibits injections.
2. Oregon's law is seldomly used, but it provides comfort and peace of mind to thousands of Oregonians facing the end of life. When the law was drafted we were aware not all terminally ill persons would qualify to use the law, but as previously stated we needed to protect the vulnerable. Because of this balance Oregon has become a leader in palliative and hospice care which provides those not eligible to use the law with options to experience an acceptable quality of life during their final months. HB 2217 will give these vulnerable persons an unfortunate out that may or may not provide the quality of end of life they anticipated.
3. During the past 25 years that I have been involved in this movement, drafting laws for other states, working with thousands of terminal ill patients, answering questions from physicians, nurses, pharmacists, legislators, and others, we have not been asked by organized groups to expand the access to the law, except to place more restrictions.

The sponsors of this bill have compassionate concerns, but to now modify Oregon's model law that has worked flawlessly may well upset the delicate balance between our goal of self determination and self administration to one of other's determination and other's administration.

For these reason we oppose HB 2217.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Eighmey".

George Eighmey, JD
Board President Death with Dignity National Center