

THE

Death with
Dignity
NATIONAL CENTER

Dignity Report

A publication of the Death with Dignity National Center

SPRING 2018



VICTORY IN HAWAI'I!

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Cover photo: Member of our ground team Will Kane with Hawai'i Governor David Ige holding the signed Our Care, Our Choice Act

GIVE DIGNITY

Death with Dignity laws provide peace of mind to qualified terminally ill residents in **California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Oregon, Vermont, Washington**, and soon also **Hawai'i**. Help us expand the option to all Americans with a generous contribution:

- a one-time or recurring gift;
- a gift in honor or in memory of a loved one;
- a gift of stock or mutual funds;
- a legacy gift.

Please visit **DeathwithDignity.org/Support** to learn more and contribute.

THANK YOU!

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IT ALL BEGAN WITH A PHONE CALL

In early 2002, staff from then-Hawai'i Governor Ben Cayetano's office contacted our founding board member, Eli Stutsman, JD, to seek advice on how to pass an assisted dying law. That call catalyzed the movement for greater end-of-life options in the Aloha State.

Last month, Hawai'i became the seventh jurisdiction to enact a death with dignity statute, a historic victory representing the work by citizens, community leaders, legislators, and supporters like you. We are proud to have played a key role in the earliest conversations and in the final push to bring autonomy to terminally ill Hawai'i residents.

ON TO MAINE AND NEW YORK

Back on the mainland, our work in Maine and New York is building momentum. In Maine, where we have worked since 2000, we have begun gathering signatures with local advocates to place an assisted dying measure on the 2019 ballot. I have been personally engaged with every step of this process, from writing the text of the ballot initiative to hiring local staff to

signing the check for a donation to launch the campaign.

In New York, we formed a new alliance with local and national organizations pushing for policy reform, a strategy that was essential to our success in Washington. As the only Oregonian in the Alliance, I was honored to be invited to testify first at a May 3 Assembly hearing on the Medical Aid in Dying Act.

THE LONG HAUL

Hours before the Hawai'i Senate passed the Our Care, Our Choice Act on March 29, I spoke by phone with the leaders of our partner organization, Ohio End of Life Options, about their nascent campaign. It may take years to pass a law in Ohio but the work begins with a call and a commitment to be there for the long haul.

We are also fighting Congress' attempts to nullify the D.C. Death with Dignity Act. In early May, we were invited to speak at D.C. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton's press conference, joining her, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser, and a host of local and national organizations in defending D.C.'s home rule.

All this progress and all these victories are only possible because of your continued support. I am grateful to have you on our team.

Peg Sandeen

From First Draft to Final Vote: Our Journey to Victory in Hawai'i

Last month, Hawai'i became the seventh jurisdiction to adopt a death with dignity statute, joining Oregon, Washington, Vermont, California, Colorado, and the District of Columbia. This victory was many years in the making.

2002: A NEAR WIN

Hawai'i Governor Ben Cayetano, a longtime supporter of death with dignity, sought to sponsor an assisted dying bill in the 2002 session. His staff reached out to our predecessor organization, Oregon Death with Dignity, for guidance.

Oregon Death with Dignity's founding board member, Eli Stutsman, JD, drafted the bill Cayetano eventually sponsored, House Bill 2487, the Hawai'i Death with Dignity Act. It was modeled closely on the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, which Stutsman co-authored.

Oregon Death with Dignity provided funding and expertise in messaging, polling, and grassroots organizing to support advocates in Hawai'i leading on-the-ground efforts.

At the time, 72 percent of Hawai'i residents supported the legislation. But HB 2487 was opposed by well-funded religious groups. In spite

of this formidable opposition, the bill passed the House 30–20 and headed to the Senate.

"Until this time, no death with dignity proposal had come within striking distance of success in [any] state legislature," Stutsman recalled.

A victory seemed imminent. But a last-minute lobbying effort by opponents persuaded three Senators to switch their votes from "yes" to "no." The bill fell short of passage by just three votes, 14–11. Cayetano sent a letter to Stutsman in November 2002 in which



Governor Cayetano's letter to Oregon Death with Dignity's Eli Stutsman, JD

he expressed his gratitude for Stutsman’s and Oregon Death with Dignity’s guidance:

“Your expertise and support were instrumental in setting the stage for what turned out to be near passage of landmark legislation for our state. ...Our well-publicized attempt to pass Death with Dignity legislation added to the national debate on this topic and has inspired officials and residents of other states.”

2003: GROWING SUPPORT

Grassroots advocates and movement leaders immediately set to work planning for the 2003 legislative session. Strength in numbers would be essential, as opponents had launched an

aggressive media campaign to defeat any proposed assisted dying legislation.

The political winds did not favor death with dignity, and the bill did not receive a hearing. Discouraged but undeterred, advocates headed back to the drawing board for 2004.

2004: A NEW FORCE EMERGES

Supporters were encouraged when lawmakers introduced a bill and passed it out of the House Judiciary Committee, 10–5. Despite the positive vote, Democratic leaders withdrew the bill before it reached the House floor, saying they did not have the votes to advance it.

In December 2004, half a dozen veteran Hawai’i advocates founded



1997 OREGON

2008 WASHINGTON

2013 VERMONT

2016 CALIFORNIA, COLORADO

2017 WASHINGTON, D.C.

2018 HAWAI’I

Find this graphic and share it on social media at
DeathwithDignity.org/States/Hawaii.

Hawai'i Death with Dignity Society. This grassroots organization, one of our on-the-ground partners, would become a leading force for policy reform in Hawai'i.

2005-2017: TRY, TRY AGAIN

Over the next dozen years, numerous death with dignity-related bills were introduced and subsequently shelved. All the while, advocates continued to build support among the general public. We worked with Hawai'i Death with Dignity Society on statewide education and advocacy efforts.

In 2017, we doubled down, working tirelessly to pass legislation and support staff and advocates in Hawai'i. The bill passed the Senate but stalled in the House. We prepared for a final push to victory in 2018.

2018: "THE TIME WAS RIGHT"

This year, the House took up four

separate death with dignity bills, choosing to advance House Bill 2739, Our Care, Our Choice Act.

We hired one of the top lobbying teams in the state and worked with them to assess the legislative landscape and identify potentially supportive lawmakers.

As our on-the-ground team worked quickly to secure votes, we informed and engaged our constituents across the country with the latest campaign updates.

The House passed the bill 39 to 12 on March 6. Less than three weeks later, the state Senate approved the bill 23 to 2. On April 5, 2018, Hawai'i Governor David Ige signed the Our Care, Our Choice Act into law. 🗳️

Read more about the new Hawai'i law and our campaign to pass it at DeathwithDignity.org/States/Hawaii.

We are grateful to the many citizens of Hawai'i who advocated for this law, for their courage to speak out and begin this conversation, and to the members of the Legislature who recognized that the will of voters could no longer be ignored.

—PEG SANDEEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DEATH WITH DIGNITY

A Choice and a Conversation

By Elaine Fong, California

My mother was first diagnosed with cancer in 2004. Eventually her cancer went into remission, but she never forgot the mental and physical side effects of treatment, and spent the next 12 years thinking deeply about the type of death she wanted to have.

In January 2016, my mother learned she had Stage IV bone cancer. She told us that she did not want any treatments or surgery. Instead, she would use Washington's Death with Dignity Act to leave the world on her own terms.

"This is my time," she said. "This is what I want."

The night before she died, we hosted a dinner party, one that she had planned. We had a beautiful feast and played her favorite songs. She was glowing the whole time.

The next morning, surrounded by family at her home, she took the medication that would hasten her death. She gave us a thumbs up, smiled, and closed her eyes. Within 45 minutes, she was gone.



Elaine Fong speaking about her mother's death at TEDx San Francisco

I can't imagine what my mom's experience would have been if she'd lived in a state where death with dignity wasn't legal. How long and how painful might it have been?

To me, death with dignity is both a choice and a conversation. It is a choice to be made by an individual for their own human needs and wishes. And it's a conversation in which all Americans can engage, to understand what it means to empower someone to make their own personal decisions at the end. 

Read the full story at DeathwithDignity.org/ElaineFong

Maine Death with Dignity Sets Its Sights on 2019 Ballot

Citizens of Maine have shown their overwhelming support for assisted dying. Next year, they will have an opportunity to vote to legalize the practice via ballot initiative, as Oregonians, Washingtonians, and Coloradans have done.

18 YEARS OF GROUNDWORK

Since 2000, we have worked alongside dedicated Mainers to advocate for passage of an assisted dying law in their state. We have collaborated closely with state-based advocacy organization, It's My Death, and multiple bills

have garnered bipartisan backing, including a 2015 bill that failed by a single vote. Today, support for death with dignity legislation among registered Maine voters has soared to 73 percent.

SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

In partnership with Valerie Lovelace, founder and executive director of It's My Death, we formed a political action committee, Maine Death with Dignity.

Last year, we jointly filed a petition to place an assisted dying measure on



Maine Death with Dignity's Val Lovelace launching the petition drive on April 19 in Augusta

the 2019 statewide ballot. Modeled closely on Oregon's law, the measure includes a lengthy list of safeguards to ensure each patient acts voluntarily, does not suffer from impaired judgment, and is capable of taking the medication by themselves. The petition has been approved by the Secretary of State's office and signature-gathering efforts began last month.

FROM LOSS TO LEADERSHIP

For Valerie, who also chairs Maine Death with Dignity's Steering Committee, the fight for assisted dying is personal. She founded It's My Death to honor her sister, Dee, who died a painful death from cancer in 2009. For more than five years, Valerie has led Maine's grassroots movement for death with dignity.

She also built strong relationships with lawmakers who sponsored



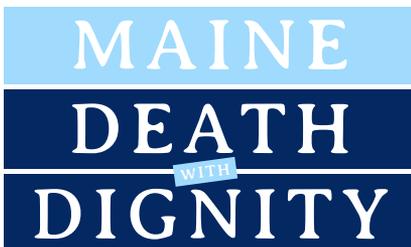
Cayla Miller, the first Mainer to sign the petition, sharing her story with reporters following the launch press conference.

bills in the 2015 and 2017 legislative sessions. Today Valerie is proud to play a role in ensuring Mainers have the opportunity to decide the issue at the ballot box.

"It is time for dying Mainers to have this end-of-life option," she said. "It is time Maine voters had their say."

Mainer Cayla Miller was the first to sign the petition at the launch event on April 19. Her mother, Eva Thompson, who died of cancer in December 2017, spent her final months advocating for death with dignity in Maine.

"I pledged to [my mother] that I would help to pass this law so others who were suffering would be able to have their choice," Cayla said. "The right to make one's exit gracefully before the pain and helplessness become unbearable should be a right we all have." 



Strength in Numbers: Our Alliance in New York

Similar to California, the adoption of an assisted dying statute in New York would boost the momentum of the death with dignity movement nationwide. And nearly 20 million Americans would gain access to an essential end-of-life option.

We have been working to make assisted dying a reality for terminally ill New Yorkers. Now, we have formed an alliance with local and national organizations to push for policy reform in the Empire State.

A BROAD COALITION

Death with Dignity National Center, Compassion & Choices New York, Death with Dignity-Albany, and End

of Life Choices New York will work together in the New York Alliance for Medical Aid in Dying to build support among legislators and New York residents for the assisted dying bill currently being considered by the New York State Assembly.

“WE’RE ALL SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE”

Laurie Leonard, executive director of EOLCNY, expressed excitement about the alliance’s efforts, including organizing supporters for a lobby day at the state capital in Albany and providing testimony at a hearing on the bill last month.

“It’s great to be working together,” she says. “We all have the same goal, we’re all speaking the same language.”

MOVING TOWARD A TIPPING POINT

“This is a long-term initiative,” adds Bonnie Edelstein, executive director of Death with Dignity-Albany. “It’s not an easy road, but momentum is building, with 77 percent of New Yorkers in favor of the legislation.”

We look forward to bringing you more news from New York in the coming months as we work in collaboration with our partners to make policy change happen. ☯



Our Board President George Eighmey at the Alliance launch in Albany on April 16.

A New Birthday Tradition

By Nicole Cook, North Carolina

Last year was the hardest year of my life: I watched my mom die.

In her final days and hours, she painfully gasped for air with every breath, unable to swallow her pain medications or care for herself.

My mom's death was not pleasant or peaceful in any way. She did not want to go like this—she'd told me as much. When she finally took her struggling last breaths, it was such a heartbreaking relief because her suffering was over.

No one should have to die this way. I believe this now more than ever. This is why I support Death with Dignity National Center in their work to expand end-of-life options for all.

FACEBOOK FUNDRAISER

For my birthday this year, instead of gifts I asked my friends on Facebook to contribute to a fundraiser, raising money for Death with Dignity National Center to support their advocacy efforts.

I was determined to raise \$300 with my Facebook Fundraiser but instead I raised \$700! I'm so proud of my friends and family for supporting a cause that I feel so

strongly about. And I know my mom would be so proud, too.

I've decided a Facebook Fundraiser is my new birthday tradition. I truly want everyone to have the option to let go of life when they are terminally ill, so they don't have to suffer through death and have their loved ones watch in agony.

YOU CAN DO IT, TOO

Are you interested in hosting a Facebook Fundraiser? It's easy to get started. Just log into Facebook, press the "Raise Money" and "Get Started" buttons. Then select Death with Dignity National Center from the list of nonprofits, and choose from the available options. It really is that simple. 🙌



Nicole and her mom



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THE Dignity Report

*“Today marks a new beginning in
treatment of the terminally ill
in Hawai‘i.”*

—PEG SANDEEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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