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Medical Aid in Dying Bill Passes on Senate Floor

Elizabeth Whitefield End-of-Life Options Act allows terminally ill adults the option to die peacefully, if and when they choose

Santa Fe, N.M. – Today, House Bill 47, The Elizabeth Whitefield End-of-Life Options Act, passed the Senate with a vote of (24-17). If enacted, this law would allow terminally ill, mentally competent adults who are given six or fewer months to live, the option to request and self-administer medication to die peacefully and on their own terms.

Sponsored by Representative Debbie Armstrong (D- Albuquerque), Representative Dayan Hochman-Vigil (D- Albuquerque), Representative Patricia Roybal Caballero (D- Albuquerque), Senator Elizabeth “Liz” Stefanics (D- Cerrillos), and Senator Bill O’Neill (D- Albuquerque), the measure is based on the State of Oregon’s 20+ year-old Death with Dignity Act. The New Mexico bill is named after the late state Judge Elizabeth Whitefield, who died of cancer in 2018. Whitefield was well-known and beloved by many on the senate floor and throughout the state. She worked with legislators for years to bring forth a measure to help the terminally ill who wish to end their suffering with dignity.

HB47 would put in place a system of Medical Aid-in-Dying, with multiple safeguards to protect vulnerable individuals from coercion while making end-of-life care available to those who qualify for and request it. Oregon data shows that less than 1/4 of 1% of all deaths are attributable to end-of life medications, and that cancer is the most common diagnosis for those who choose to use the option.

“This bill is about compassion for the suffering. Adults with terminal illnesses should have the freedom to choose the end-of-life options that are right for them, said Senate sponsor Liz Stefanics. “I am grateful to the Senate for passing this legislation today and am hopeful that it will soon be made into law.”

Aid in Dying is currently legal in nine other states and the District of Columbia. In a recent Gallup Poll Social Survey, nearly three out of four U.S. residents (74%) agreed that when a person has a disease that cannot be cured, doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient’s life by some painless means if the patient requests it.

The bill will go to Governor Lujan Grisham for her signature once the House concurs with the bill as amended by the Senate.

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