

Charges thrown out against US right-to-die leader

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(AP)—A judge dismissed charges against the former leader of a U.S. right-to-die group accused in the death of a Minnesota woman, ruling that the state law against advising suicide is unconstitutionally overbroad.

The judge dismissed charges against Thomas Goodwin, former president of Final Exit Network. The group argued the law violates a person's right to [freedom of speech](#).

Last year, four members of the group were charged in the 2007 death of Doreen Dunn, who killed herself in her home. Prosecutors said the defendants provided Dunn with information and support to follow through with her suicide. Dunn had suffered through a decade of intense, [chronic pain](#) after a [medical procedure](#) went wrong.

Final Exit Network is run by volunteers who believe that mentally competent adults have a basic human right to end their lives if they suffer from "fatal or irreversible illness or intractable pain" and meet other criteria, according to the group's website. "We do not encourage anyone to end their life," the website says.

Goodwin was charged with aiding and abetting assistance of a suicide, a felony, and aiding and abetting in the interference with a death scene, a gross misdemeanor.

Final Exit members say the act of giving information and emotional support could be interpreted as "encouraging" under a Minnesota law

that makes it a felony for someone to intentionally assist, advise or encourage suicide.

In [court documents](#), Final Exit Network general counsel Robert Rivas wrote that while the state may bar someone from "assisting" a suicide, it is unconstitutional for the state to ban "advising" or "encouraging" a suicide—pure speech.

Prosecutors contend the statute is narrowly worded so advocates of suicide may freely speak their minds but that those who "intentionally" assist, encourage or advise suicide are breaking the law.

[Prosecutors](#) said it's not against the law to commit suicide, but the [assisted suicide](#) statute is designed to preserve human life.

Rivas wrote that the statute could be interpreted to make it a crime for "exit guides" to advise people on how to die peacefully and with certainty if they decide to take their lives.

An indictment charges Final Exit Network, its former medical director Lawrence Egbert, 85, and three other officials with felony counts of assisting [suicide](#) and interference with a death scene, a gross misdemeanor.

Prosecutor James Backstrom said in a statement that his office was pleased the judge found probable cause for most of the counts in the indictment against Final Exit Network and several of its members. Backstrom said his office is reviewing the judge's ruling on the law's constitutionality to determine how to proceed.

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