

Canada agrees to hear appeal in right-to-die case

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Canada's highest court said Thursday it will hear an appeal in a case that could grant terminally ill people the right to assisted suicide.

The case seeks to allow seriously and incurably ill but mentally competent adults the right to receive medical assistance to hasten death under specific safeguards, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association said in a statement.

It has been illegal in Canada to counsel, aid or abet a suicide, an offense carrying a maximum prison sentence of 14 years.

The Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear the appeal in the case of Gloria Taylor and Kay Carter, who were terminally ill. Taylor was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, a degenerative neurological illness. Carter was diagnosed with a degenerative spinal cord condition.

A justice with the B.C. Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that the existing federal law banning doctor-assisted suicide is unconstitutional because it discriminates against severely ill patients. However, the justice delayed her ruling for a year to allow the [federal government](#) to rewrite the statute.

She also granted Taylor an exemption that allowed her to seek assisted death.

The provincial court of appeal overturned the ruling but let the

exemption stand. Taylor died of an infection in October 2012.

Carter traveled to a clinic in Switzerland in 2010 to drink a toxic dose of sodium pentobarbital.

It has been nearly 20 years since the tale of another patient with Lou Gehrig's disease, Sue Rodriguez, gripped Canada as she fought for the right to assisted suicide. She lost her appeal but took her own life with the help of an anonymous doctor in 1994, at the age of 44.

The [civil liberties](#) group is continuing the fight. It said Elayne Shapray, a woman with multiple sclerosis who is seeking the right to die with dignity, has joined the challenge to the existing law.

Proponents of [assisted suicide](#) argue that the Rodriguez ruling is outdated and that society's view of the issue has changed significantly.

Opponents argue that allowing assisted deaths could lead to abuses of the elderly and infirm.

The federal government argues that the Rodriguez ruling is the final word on the subject.

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