

Colorado rejects right-to-die legislation

February 7 2015, byIvan Moreno



Colorado Rep. Joann Ginal, right, D-Fort Collins, hugs Carol Stork of Delta, Colo., after her testimony about the death of her terminally-ill husband, Albert, on Jan. 2, during a Colorado legislative hearing on a bill proposal by Ginal that would give dying patients the option to seek help ending their lives Friday, Feb. 6, 2015, in Denver. Dozens of people with serious illnesses and others who have seen relatives suffer were on hand for the first public hearing on the measure, which would put Colorado among a handful of states currently considering laws to allow the terminally ill to get doctor-prescribed medication to die. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

(AP)—Colorado lawmakers rejected a proposal to give dying patients

the option to seek doctors' help ending their lives, concluding a long day of emotional testimony from more than 100 people.

For one lawmaker who voted no, the issue was personal. Tearfully telling her colleagues she was a cancer survivor, Democratic Rep. Dianne Primavera recalled how a doctor told her she wouldn't live more than five years.

But she found a doctor who gave her a different opinion.

"And he took me in his care, and I am here today 28 years later," she said.

Doctors who opposed the measure told lawmakers earlier that allowing dying patients to seek life-ending medications from a physician closed off the possibility of a recovery when a prognosis can sometimes be wrong.

A House committee considering the bill voted 8-5 against it after dozens of people with serious illnesses and others who have seen relatives suffer packed the Colorado legislative hearing.

The vote comes as a handful of other states, including California and Pennsylvania, consider laws to allow the terminally ill get doctor-prescribed medication to die.

Five states allow patients to seek aid in dying: Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont and New Mexico.



Colorado Rep. Loius Court, D-Denver, consoles Carol Stork of Delta, Colo., after her testimony about the death of her terminally-ill husband Albert last month during a Colorado legislative hearing on a proposal sponsored by Court and Rep. Joann Ginal that would give dying patients the option to seek help ending their lives Friday, Feb. 6, 2015, in Denver. Dozens of people with serious illnesses and others who have seen relatives suffer were on hand for the first public hearing on the measure, which would put Colorado among a handful of states currently considering laws to allow the terminally ill to get doctor-prescribed medication to die. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

"This bill represents a very personal freedom that for some is taken away in the final stages of their illness," said Democratic Rep. Joann Ginal, one of the bill sponsors. "Physicians give patients the best possible care. But there comes a time when a physician is no longer able to heal."

Religious organizations opposed the measure, saying it facilitated suicide. But supporters argued that [terminally ill patients](#) should control

when they die.

The story of Brittany Maynard last year spotlighted the debate over whether doctors should be able to prescribe life-ending medication to patients. Maynard, 29, moved from California to Oregon after being diagnosed with terminal brain cancer so she could use that state's law. She died Nov. 1.

Colorado's bill was modeled after Oregon's. It would have required dying patients to get two doctors to sign off on their oral and written requests to end their lives. The patients also would have needed to be found to be mentally competent and be able to administer the life-ending medication themselves.

One of the opponents to the bill, Carrie Ann Lucas, spoke on behalf of Not Dead Yet, a New-York based disability rights group.

Lucas uses a wheelchair and ventilator because of a neuromuscular disease. She told lawmakers that she worries the proposal would make it easy for a disabled person who is depressed to get medication from a doctor. Without her ventilator, Lucas told lawmakers, she would have only hours to live. And, she said, if she were to get depressed, she thinks she could go to a doctor who doesn't know her well to get the drugs.

"And they probably would give me that lethal prescription instead of referring me to mental-health treatment that I would so desperately need," said Lucas, 43.

Boulder resident David Hibbard, 77, told lawmakers that as a hospice physician for the past 15 years, he knows what to expect once his Parkinson's disease and leukemia advance.

"I will be hunched over, either bed-bound or in a wheelchair," he said,

his hands shaking as he spoke. He would be unable to talk and feed himself, Hibbard told [lawmakers](#).

"I don't want to endure this scenario, and I certainly don't want to have my family, my wife and my three children, have to endure watching me go through this rapid deterioration," he said.

Lawmakers hearing the bill raised concerns about whether there are enough safeguards to prevent abuse, such a family member advocating for life-ending medications on behalf of a dying relative. Lawmakers also wondered what would happen if the medications are not used, and whether someone other than the patient could then take them.

One lawmaker, Rep. Jon Keyser, R-Morrison, said he worries Colorado could become a state known for "suicide tourism" if the bill passes.

The Colorado legislation was inspired by Charles Selsberg, 77, who urged legislators to take on the issue with an editorial published in The Denver Post shortly before his death a year ago. Selsberg died of ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

His daughter, Julie Selsberg, wiped away tears after the vote. She supported the bill.

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