

California governor signs hard-won right-to-die legislation

October 5 2015, byJudy Lin



In this Sept. 9, 2015, file photo, Debbie Ziegler holds a photo of her late daughter, Brittany Maynard, as she receives congratulations from Ellen Pontac, left, after a right-to die measure was approved by the state Assembly in Sacramento, Calif. California will become the fifth state to allow terminally ill patients to legally end their lives using doctor-prescribed drugs after Gov. Jerry Brown announced Monday, Oct. 5, 2015 he signed one of the most emotionally charged bills of the year. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

California will become the fifth U.S. state to allow terminally ill patients to legally end their lives using doctor-prescribed drugs after Gov. Jerry Brown announced Monday he had signed the legislation.

Brown, a lifelong Catholic and former Jesuit seminarian, announced he signed the legislation after thoroughly considering all opinions and discussing the issue with many people, including a Catholic bishop and two of Brown's doctors.

"In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death," the governor wrote in a signing statement that accompanied his signature on the legislation. "I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill.

He added he wouldn't deny that right to others.

Until now, Brown had declined to comment on the issue.

State lawmakers approved the bill on Sept. 11. A previous version failed this year despite the highly publicized case of 29-year-old Brittany Maynard, a California woman with brain cancer who moved to Oregon where she could legally end her life.

Opponents said the bill legalizes premature suicide, but supporters call that comparison inappropriate because it applies to mentally sound, terminally ill people and not those who are depressed or impaired.

Religious groups and advocates for people with disabilities opposed the bill and nearly identical legislation that had stalled in the Legislature weeks earlier, saying it goes against the will of God and puts [terminally ill patients](#) at risk for coerced death.



In this Sept. 11, 2015 file photo, Debbie Ziegler, mother of Brittany Maynard, speaks to the media after the passage of legislation, which would allow terminally ill patients to legally end their lives, at the state Capitol in Sacramento, Calif. The measure to allow doctors to prescribe life-ending medication succeeded on its second attempt after the heavily publicized case of Maynard, the woman with brain cancer who moved to Oregon to legally take her life. California will become the fifth state in the nation to allow terminally ill patients to legally end their lives using doctor-prescribed drugs. (AP Photo/Carl Costas, File)

The measure was brought back as part of a special session intended to address funding shortfalls for the state's [health insurance program](#) for the poor. The governor had criticized the move to bypass the usual process.

The bill he received includes requirements that the patient be physically

capable of taking the medication themselves, that two doctors approve it, that the patient submit several written requests, and that there be two witnesses, one of whom is not a family member.

California's measure came after at least two dozen states introduced aid-in-dying legislation this year, though the measures stalled elsewhere. Doctors in Oregon, Washington state, Vermont and Montana already can prescribe life-ending drugs.

Maynard's family attended the legislative debate in California throughout the year. Maynard's mother, Debbie Ziegler, testified in committee hearings and carried a large picture of her daughter as she listened to lawmakers' debate.

In a video recorded days before Maynard took life-ending drugs, she told California lawmakers that no one should have to leave home to legally kill themselves under the care of a doctor.

"No one should have to leave their home and community for peace of mind, to escape suffering, and to plan for a gentle death," Maynard said in the video released by right-to-die advocates after her death.

The Catholic Church targeted Catholic lawmakers before the bill's passage and urged the governor to veto it.

"Pope Francis invites all of us to create our good society by seeing through the eyes of those who are on the margins, those in need economically, physically, psychologically and socially," the California Catholic Conference said in a statement after its passage.

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