

Australian state takes step toward legalizing euthanasia

October 20 2017, by Rod McGuirk

An Australian state took a step toward allowing voluntary euthanasia on Friday, 20 years after the country repealed the world's first mercy killing law.

The Victorian Legislation Assembly passed a euthanasia bill by 47 votes to 37 after a passionate debate lasting almost 26 hours.

Voluntary euthanasia will become legal in Australia's second most populous state if the bill is passed by the Parliament's upper chamber on Oct. 31.

Australia's sparsely populated Northern Territory in 1995 became the first jurisdiction in the world to legalize doctor-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients. But the Australian Parliament overturned that law in 1997 after four people had been helped to die. The Australian Parliament does not have the same power to repeal the laws of states such as Victoria.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, who became a euthanasia advocate after his father died of cancer last year, described the draft state laws as the most conservative in the world.

"My colleagues and I are very proud that we have taken a very big step toward giving many, many Victorians the dignity and compassion they have been denied for far too long," Andrews told reporters after the vote.

New South Wales, Australia's most populous state, will debate its own euthanasia laws in its Sydney-based Parliament next month.

Laws to legalize mercy killings have been rejected by two of Australia's six states.

A euthanasia bill was defeated by a single vote in the South Australian House of Assembly in November and similar legislation was rejected by two votes in Tasmania's House of Assembly in 2013.

Under the Victorian law, only people registered on the electoral roll as living in that state would be eligible to access medical help to die. Candidates must be assessed by two doctors as having a terminal illness with less than a year to live and be in intolerable pain.

A doctor would be permitted to administer a lethal injection only in cases where patients were physically incapable of doing so themselves.

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