

Dear Members of the Washington State Senate,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, oppose ESHB 1141. We respectfully request that this Legislature take no action regarding the protections in the Death with Dignity law.

The Death with Dignity Initiative, which was passed by Washington voters in 2010, allows physicians to prescribe lethal medication to terminally-ill individuals under their care in response to patient request. Some safeguards were included in the Initiative to protect against the obvious danger that people will be coaxed or even pressured to end life, and also to make allowance for people changing their minds, or considering other options. The concern that others will pressure for assisted suicide because one's life is "not worth living" is not merely theoretical for individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions. There are some protections that were built into the Death with Dignity law when the Initiative passed. The proponents of HB 1141 believe that these protections are acting as "barriers".

Are the protections acting as barriers? Two years ago, the Legislature sought an answer. In the 2020 session, the Legislature passed HB 2419, which created a study that was to be led by the University of Washington, regarding the Death with Dignity Act and potential barriers to its use. In April 2020 the [Governor vetoed](#) HB 2419, citing the impact of the pandemic on state revenue. That study would have provided information that could have helped legislators decide whether to pass HB 1141.

Instead of solid information and analysis on how the Death with Dignity bill is working, we have mostly anecdotes. Many of the anecdotes we do have suggest there are reasons to keep the protections. We have no objective evidence that the protections in the original Death with Dignity law don't work, or that they act as barriers to using the option of assisted suicide. At the hearings in the Senate and the House on this bill last year (2021 session), the bill's supporters provided their anecdotes identifying delays people experienced and suffering that resulted. Meanwhile, testimony opposing the bill was presented to show why protections must be in place. Communities of color and people with disabilities often don't have proper pain control, or are perceived as having lives not worth living. The lack of clear information on what is working and not working with the law resulted in a narrow 7 to 5 decision to move the bill ahead in the Senate Health and Long-Term Care committee. Several Senators who voted for the bill said they had deep reservations, but were willing to let it continue. The hesitation of the committee members is clear from their [discussion](#).

It should not be taken for granted that the protections in this bill are "barriers". The protections in the original law are neither arbitrary or without foundation.

- There are reasons for requiring a 15-day waiting period before dispensing lethal medications. People change their minds.
- There are reasons why lethal medications must be delivered in person, rather than through the mail – they can fall in the wrong hands.
- There are reasons why physicians must prescribe the medication – patient needs are complex, it is difficult to assess whether a person is terminally ill, and only a physician has the necessary training to make these judgments.

The Legislature should hear from all communities before taking action on this issue. End-of-life issues are especially difficult and contentious. HB 1141 was not circulated broadly in the disability advocacy community prior to the legislative session last year, and there has been no substantial effort to address the concerns since then. The bill reflects the perceptions and interests of those who support expanding the availability of assisted suicide. The specific concerns of people with disabilities were not considered and weighed in developing this bill. People with disabilities, and communities of color, have a long history of having their wishes discounted and treatment withheld by members of

the medical community.

Some of those signing this letter oppose the Death with Dignity law based on religious or ethical grounds, but others support the underlying law. The grounds for opposing HB 1141 cited in this letter are neither religious nor ethical. **We oppose HB 1141 because it undercuts basic protections that were written into the Initiative passed by the people of Washington in 2010.** We believe that if it is enacted, HB 1141 is likely to increase the risk that the wishes of people with disabilities regarding their end-of-life will be ignored or overridden.

Please do not schedule this legislation for a vote; if it is given a vote, please oppose it.

Respectfully,

Organizations

- Allies in Advocacy
- Developmental Disabilities Ombuds
- Disability Rights Washington
- Caring With Compassion Community TM
- Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
- People First of Washington
- Pierce County People First Chapter
- Self Advocates in Leadership (SAIL)
- Washington ADAPT
- Washington Civil & Disability Advocate

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