

HB 284

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MT medical lic # 4505 (since 1980)

Oppose because:

1. Medical aid in Dying (MAID) offers an individual facing imminent death from an incurable disease the option to die at home, with family, and with comfort.
2. Experience from other states, such as Oregon where the option of MAID has been an option for 20 years, shows:
 - a. ~1 in 250 deaths occur this way. (In Oregon, 991 total MAID deaths in 18 years, these 991 prescriptions written by 336 physicians)*
 - b. There is no established evidence of coercion or other misuse.
 - c. About 2/3 of those choosing this option have terminal cancer; data shows that it is not only pain, but other factors and other untreatable diseases affecting heart, lung, and nerves, that lead a person to choose MAID.
 - d. As in other states, the Baxter ruling states that a participant be an adult, be mentally competent, and have a terminal illness.
3. I have been a physician for more than 50 years, and as a neurologist am expert in ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) often called Lou Gehrig disease. Some 5-7% of participants in MAID have this condition. This disease affects previously normal people, most often in their 50's or 60's. It kills the nerve cells in the spinal cord that control our muscles. Over the course of several years progressive weakness occurs to the point that they can no longer move, speak clearly, or swallow food. However, they remain perfectly alert and mentally normal, with intact vision and hearing. Try to imagine yourself in that situation. Many want to explore all options for comfort for themselves and their family.

I urge you to reject the scare tactics used to criticise the practice of MAID:

- It is totally voluntary on the part of both patient and physician.
- It is not euthanasia, which is illegal in all 50 states.
- In states where it has been available for years there is widespread public support for it and transparent review of those programs has not identified abuse.
- In Montana we have strong legal guidelines and public support for how we care for the terminally ill. (MCA 50-9-101 to 111). We have had MAID for almost 10 years without evident abuse. A 2013 survey showed 69% of Montana citizens support MAID.

Let Montanans continue to have the ability to make thoughtful, sound decisions for their own lives, and death.

Thank you for your service to the state of Montana, and for rejecting this government overreach into an individual's privacy and the confidential doctor/patient relationship.

*JAMA Oncol. 2017;3(10) 1403-1406.