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Sometimes they don't have 15 days

SB 579: Waives 15-day second-request wait for death with dignity when a physician can verify the patient doesn't have that long to live

SALEM – Sometimes 15 days is too long to wait when a terminally ill patient elects to pursue death with dignity.

[Senate Bill 579](#) – which passed the Senate on a 16-11 vote today – waives the 15-day waiting period between oral requests for life-ending medication that is currently required under the Oregon Death with Dignity Act. This act only applies to patients who are diagnosed with terminal illness with fewer than 15 days to live; who are capable of making the decision; and who voluntarily request life-ending medication.

“Sometimes when a patient decides that they want to end their own pain and suffering with dignity and with the assistance of a physician, they don't have enough time to go through the entire process,” said Sen. Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene). “Often the end stages of terminal illness are the worst and this provides an opportunity – for those who are suffering and are capable of making this decision – to utilize the legal option Oregon provides for them to have a dignified end.”

The Oregon Death with Dignity Act was enacted by voters in 1994 and implemented in 1997. Since that time, more than 2,200 prescriptions for lethal medications have been written and 1,459 deaths resulted from those prescriptions. To use this avenue, a person must have a terminal illness and be capable of making his or her own decisions. Then the patient makes a series of voluntary requests. The patient is required to make one written and two oral requests.

After the first oral request, the patient must wait another 15 days to make the second oral request. After that, another 48 hours must pass between a patient's written request and prescribing life-ending drugs.

Under Senate Bill 579, to be eligible to waive the 15-day wait between oral requests, the attending physician must determine – within reasonable medical judgment – that the person will die within 15 days after making the initial oral request. The bill also requires that the patient's medical record contain a medically confirmed certificate of imminence of the patient's death.

"The purpose of this legislation is to make sure a person who is terminally ill, and in their final days, can choose their own terms for how their life ends," Prozanski said. "The voters gave patients this right 25 years ago. We want to allow those who are most likely to use this right the ability to do so, if they choose."

Senate Bill 579 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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