

# Libertarians Overwhelmingly Support Medical Aid in Dying

## Strong Libertarian Party Support for Medical Aid in Dying

The medical aid-in-dying movement and the Libertarian Party share important core values: individual rights, personal liberty and self-ownership. By a 6-1 margin (86% vs. 14%), Libertarians overwhelmingly agree that terminally ill patients should be allowed to choose medical aid in dying as an end-of-life option.<sup>1</sup>

## Libertarian Endorsements of Medical Aid-in-Dying Laws

A growing number of Libertarian Party state affiliates and thought leaders are endorsing medical aid in dying laws. These endorsements are in alignment with the National Libertarian Party platform.<sup>2</sup>

- > The Libertarian Party of Maryland endorsed the Maryland Death with Dignity Act (recently renamed the End of Life Options Act) in November, 2015.<sup>3</sup>
- > The Libertarian Party of Orange County endorsed the California version of the End of Life Option Act in 2015.<sup>4</sup> It subsequently was signed into law in October, 2015.
- > Libertarian and nationally syndicated Washington Post columnist George Will endorsed the California End of Life Option Act, saying "There is nobility in suffering bravely borne, but also in affirming at the end the distinctive human dignity of autonomous choice."<sup>5</sup>

A resounding 86 percent of Libertarian voters support medical aid in dying as an end-of-life option.

## Many Request Medical Aid in Dying Because of the Concern Over Loss of Personal Autonomy

Medical aid in dying (also known as death with dignity) is a medical practice in which a terminally ill, mentally capable person with a prognosis of six months or less to live requests, obtains and - if their suffering becomes unbearable - self-ingests medication that brings about a peaceful death. Prior to providing a prescription for such medication, doctors must confirm that the person is fully informed and provide them with information about additional end-of-life options, including comfort care, hospice and pain control. A primary reason terminally ill people request medical aid in dying is concern that their illness will diminish their personal autonomy.<sup>6</sup> Research conducted in Oregon suggests that having medical aid in dying as an option actually relieves worries about future discomfort, pain and loss of control.<sup>7</sup>

## Strong Public Support for Medical Aid in Dying

The American public consistently supports medical aid in dying by large majorities and the issue is of great importance to voters, as measured by national independent polling outlets such as Gallup (68 percent support in May 2015) and The Harris Poll (74 percent support in November 2014). State-by-state polling also indicates that majority support cuts across demographic groups.

- > Five of the top 14 states with the highest

concentration of Libertarian voters<sup>8</sup> currently authorize medical aid in dying (Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont and California) as an end-of-life option for terminally ill, mentally capable adults who want the freedom to obtain prescription medication they can take to shorten unbearable suffering.

- > Since 2015, medical aid-in-dying legislation has been introduced in the District of Columbia and 27 states: Alaska, Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

## **Healthcare Professionals Support Medical Aid in Dying**

A growing number of national and state organizations representing healthcare professionals have endorsed or accepted medical aid in dying as an end-of-life option for mentally capable, terminally ill adults. The prestigious and peer-reviewed Journal of Palliative Medicine published clinical criteria for medical aid in dying, which physicians use to ensure that the practice meets the highest standards of medical care.<sup>9</sup>

A 2014 Medscape survey of 17,000 U.S. doctors representing 28 medical specialties agreed by a 23-percent margin (54% vs. 31%) that medical aid in dying should be available as an end-of-life option.<sup>10</sup> In addition to Compassion & Choices, national public health and medical organizations such as the American Public Health Association, American Medical Women's Association and American Medical Student Association have adopted supportive positions on medical aid in dying at the national level.

In 2015, the California Medical Association dropped its 28-year opposition to medical aid in dying and adopted a neutral position on the practice, concluding: "As physicians, we want to provide the best care possible for our patients. However, despite the remarkable medical breakthroughs

we've made and the world-class hospice or palliative care we can provide, it isn't always enough ... **it's up to the patient and their physician to choose the course of treatment best suited for the situation.**"<sup>11</sup>

## **Excerpts From the National Libertarian Party Platform (2014)**

### **PREAMBLE**

As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty; a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives and no one is forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others ...

The world we seek to build is one where individuals are free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government or any authoritarian power.

### **STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

We, the members of the Libertarian Party, challenge the cult of the omnipotent state and defend the rights of the individual.

We hold that all individuals have the right to exercise sole dominion over their own lives, and have the right to live in whatever manner they choose, so long as they do not forcibly interfere with the equal right of others to live in whatever manner they choose ...

#### **1.0 Personal Liberty**

Individuals should be free to make choices for themselves and to accept responsibility for the consequences of the choices they make.

Our support of an individual's right to make choices in life does not mean that we necessarily approve or disapprove of those choices.

No individual, group, or government may initiate force against any other individual, group, or government.

## 1.1 Self-Ownership

Individuals own their bodies and have rights over them that other individuals, groups, and governments may not violate. Individuals have the freedom and responsibility to decide what they knowingly and voluntarily consume, and what risks they accept to their own health, finances, safety, or life.

## 2.9 Health Care

... We recognize the freedom of individuals to determine ... the level of health care they want, the care providers they want, the medicines and treatments they will use and all other aspects of their medical care, including end-of-life decisions ...

## Resources

- <sup>1</sup>Live Poll: Libertarians: Should terminally ill patients be allowed to end their lives via assisted suicide? Began in 2013. Available from <http://www.isidewith.com/poll/965550/962379>.
- <sup>2</sup>Libertarian Party Platform, as adopted in Convention, June 2014, Columbus, Ohio. Available from <http://www.lp.org/platform>.
- <sup>3</sup>Libertarian Party of Maryland Endorses the Death With Dignity Act. November 27, 2015. Libertarian Party of Maryland. Available from <http://lpmaryland.org/libertarian-party-of-maryland-endorses-the-death-with-dignity-act/>.
- <sup>4</sup>Bill Analysis, Senate Judiciary Committee. End of Life Act. 2015. Available from [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb\\_0101-0150/sb\\_128\\_cfa\\_20150407\\_095601\\_sen\\_comm.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb_0101-0150/sb_128_cfa_20150407_095601_sen_comm.html).
- <sup>5</sup>Will, G. Washington Post, Affirming a right to die with dignity. August 28, 2015. Available from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/distinctions-in-end-of-life-decisions/2015/08/28/b34b8f6a-4ce7-11e5-902f-39e9219e574b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/distinctions-in-end-of-life-decisions/2015/08/28/b34b8f6a-4ce7-11e5-902f-39e9219e574b_story.html).
- <sup>6</sup>Oregon Death With Dignity Act: 2015 Data Summary. Oregon Public Health Division, Feb. 4, 2016. <https://public.health.oregon.gov/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Documents/year18.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup>Ganzini, L., T.A. Harvath, A Jackson, et al. (2002) Experiences of Oregon nurses and social workers with hospice patients who requested assistance with suicide. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 347 (8): 585.
- <sup>8</sup>Which states have the most Libertarians. This map will tell you. June 26, 2015. Available from <http://reason.com/blog/2015/06/26/this-map-shows-how-many-libertarians-are>.
- <sup>9</sup>Orentlicher, D., Pope, T.M., Rich, B.A. (2015) Clinical Criteria for Physician Aid in Dying. *Journal of Palliative Medicine*. 18(x): 1-4.
- <sup>10</sup>Kane, L. Medscape Ethics Report 2014, Part 1: Life, Death, and Pain. Medscape Ethics Center. December 2014. Available from <http://www.medscape.com/features/slideshow/public/ethics2014-part1#2>.
- <sup>11</sup>California Medical Association. Excerpted from: CMA changes stance on physician aid in dying, takes neutral position on End of Life Option Act. June 2, 2015. Emphasis added. Available from <http://www.cmanet.org/news/detail/?article=cma-changes-stance-on-physician-aid-in-dying>.