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Legislators Introduce “Compassionate Choices” Bill

MADISON, Wis. – Today, Senator Fred Risser (D-Madison) and Representatives Sondy Pope (D- Mt. Horeb), and Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton) introduced LRB-2248/1, the Compassionate Choices bill. The legislators released the following joint statement regarding the bill:

Wisconsin’s Compassionate Choices allows an individual who is suffering from a terminal illness to choose to medically end their life in a dignified manner at a time of their choosing. The law would require that the individual is a resident of Wisconsin, is of sound mind, is not incapacitated, is at least 18 years of age, and has received approval from an attending physician before medication can be administered.

“The Compassionate Choices bill allows terminally ill individuals to end their life on their own terms,” said Representative Sondy Pope. “It is inhumane to force a person with a terminal illness to suffer needlessly. A compassionate society would allow them the choice to spend their last days where and with whomever they choose.”

In the past few years, Vermont, Washington, and Oregon have adopted Compassionate Choices laws. Earlier this year, Washington D.C. also approved similar legislation. The practice is legal in Montana too, as they do not have statutes that forbid it. Twenty-three other states have introduced or plan to consider similar bills in their current legislative sessions. Oregon’s Death with Dignity law – which served as a model for other states’ laws – has been in place since 1997, and has proven that the law is safe and only used as intended. Since that passage of the law 1,545 patients have been given the prescription, while only 991 chose to use it.

“Mentally competent persons who know death is imminent should be given the freedom to die on their own terms if they wish,” said Senator Risser.

According to recent polls, public opinion overwhelmingly (70%) favors allowing patients to end their lives painlessly and with dignity.

“This wise legislation will only be used as a last resort,” said Representative Dianne Hesselbein. “Don’t we all deserve to have a last resort when the alternative is a slow and painful death? Let’s not require brave people to endure suffering beyond their capacity. Let us respect our loved ones enough to put in their responsible hands, the ability to control the answer to the question, ‘to be or not to be.’ ”

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