



## California's assembly passes physician assisted dying bill

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California looks set to permit physician assisted dying next year after its state assembly passed the End of Life Option Act by 43 votes to 34 on 9 September. The legislation is closely modeled on the Oregon law that has permitted terminally ill patients to end their life in that state since 1997. Only patients who file two written requests and have less than six months to live can avail themselves of the law.

The bill had stalled earlier this year in committee, and was not expected to pass this year, until Governor Jerry Brown called for a special legislative session in August to consider healthcare funding. Assembly member Susan Eggman, a Democrat and former hospice worker, seized the opportunity to reintroduce the bill.

Similar bills were rejected in California's legislature in 2005 and 2007, and the state's voters rejected physician assisted dying in a 1992 plebiscite. But opinion has shifted in the state, particularly after the highly publicised case of Brittany Maynard, a 29 year old California resident with incurable brain cancer who moved to Oregon last year to end her life. Maynard's husband and mother were present at the legislative debate.

The bill now moves to the state senate, where its passage is seen as a foregone conclusion. It will then await the governor's signature. Jerry Brown, a Democrat and former Jesuit seminarian, has not yet taken a position on right to die legislation.

Unless he vetoes the bill, California will become the largest right to die jurisdiction in North America and the world next

year. Canada, with a slightly smaller population, is set to drop its criminal prohibition against physicians aiding the terminally ill to die in February, following a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada last year. But except for Quebec, no Canadian province has a legal framework in place to regulate the practice.

The California law has a sunset clause meaning that it will automatically expire in 10 years unless renewed by the assembly—a last minute concession which enabled the bill's supporters to attract three Republican votes.

The California Medical Association dropped its longstanding opposition to assisted dying earlier this year, formally adopting a neutral stance.

**thebmj.com** Editorial: Why the Assisted Dying Bill should become law in England and Wales (doi:10.1136/bmj.g4349)

Briefing: Assisted dying: law and practice around the world (doi:10.1136/bmj.h4481)

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