

FINAL OPTIONS ILLINOIS

Advancing the Right to Aid in Dying

August, 2016

Aid in Dying Starts Up in California and all across Canada

What a period it's been !!!

Historic dates in 2014, 2015 and 2016:

June 2014 – Canadian province of **Quebec** passes a groundbreaking aid-in-dying law, by 94 to 22 majority

February 2015 – **Canadian Supreme Court** rules unanimously that aid in dying is a fundamental human right, part of a broader right to compassionate care at end of life

September 11, 2015 – **California legislature** passes the **End of Life Option Act**

October 5, 2015 – **Governor Jerry Brown** signs it

December 10, 2015 – the **Quebec law** takes effect

June 6, 2016 – the **Canadian Supreme Court** ruling takes effect, striking down all previous statutes banning aid-in-dying

June 9, 2016 – the **California law** takes effect

June 17, 2016 – **Canadian parliament** completes passage of **Bill C-14**, making aid in dying immediately and fully legal all across Canada

Aid in dying is now legal in **five states**:

California, Oregon, Washington, Montana and Vermont

California is our largest state -- 40 million people, 12.8% of the US population. Total for all five states is about 50 million people, roughly 15% of US population

Aid in Dying is legal all across **Canada**, in **Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg**, and in **Colombia**.

As can be seen: **The campaign for aid-in-dying is an immense worldwide movement.**

Governor Jerry Brown's immensely profound signing statement for the California law

Governor Brown issued a profound and brief signing statement – five short paragraphs:

"The crux of the matter," he wrote, "is whether the State of California should make it a crime for a dying person to end his life, no matter how great his pain or suffering." He noted the many arguments pro and con, and concluded:

"In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death.

I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain.

I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others."

The strength of public support for this wonderful new law was evident on January 5, 2016, when it was announced that opponents had failed to raise enough signatures to put a referendum trying to overturn it on the November ballot. **"An overwhelming majority of Californians supports the End of Life Option Act,"** said Toni Broaddus, California campaign director for Compassion & Choices, which led the statewide campaign to pass the law. "Opponents simply could not inspire the people of California to take away options for people who are dying."

Our motto: Our doctors can help us die – if we let them. No one must ever be encouraged or coerced to hasten their death, but the law must be changed to allow it. So that if our suffering becomes intolerable, we can choose to end it, peacefully and painlessly.

Why we call it death with dignity: because there's no dignity in suffering.

Every one of us should have the right to choose whether to say, and when to say:

"I've suffered enough, it's time to go."

It should be our choice, and no one else's.

The groundbreaking Canadian law And the fascinating debate in Canada

The new Canadian law is similar to the US laws in that it is explicitly limited to people approaching death. The US laws define this as an expectation of dying within six months, and the Canadian law says that death must be “reasonably foreseeable.”

Here’s the exact wording of the Canadian law. It allows assisted dying for consenting adults “in an advanced stage of irreversible decline” from a serious and “incurable” disease, illness or disability and for whom natural death is “reasonably foreseeable.”

The Canadian law goes far beyond the US laws, however: it allows the doctor to administer the life-ending medication. “Self-administration” is not required. Dying has to be your freely chosen choice, and you have to be a mentally competent adult. But you can either take the meds yourself, or have the doctor administer them.

This is obviously far more civilized than requiring self-administration. At the end, many of us are incapable of self-administration, and there’s nothing wrong with the doctor doing it, if it’s the freely chosen choice of a mentally competent adult. It’s a doctor’s duty to comfort their dying patients.

The most fascinating part of the story: the Canadian Supreme Court ruling is even stronger, making aid in dying a fundamental human right of a mentally competent adult, regardless of how close one is to death. The main aid-in-dying group, Dying With Dignity Canada, and many Canadian senators worked hard to make the bill cover mentally competent adults whose suffering is intolerable even though their death may not be near, and they were disappointed that the bill included the “reasonably foreseeable” language. Certainly we have not heard the last from Canada.

Proof positive that aid in dying is a fundamental component of a civilized society. Since the Quebec law went into effect in December 2015, it has been requested by 253 patients, with 166 receiving it, reported CBC News in Montreal on July 7. Of course we want our doctors to relieve our suffering at the end!

The Canadian bill’s profound preamble:

“Whereas the Parliament of Canada recognizes the autonomy of persons who have a grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes them enduring and intolerable suffering and who wish to seek medical assistance in dying;

Whereas robust safeguards, reflecting the irrevocable nature of ending a life, are essential to prevent errors and abuse in the provision of medical assistance in dying;

Whereas it is important to affirm the inherent and equal value of every person’s life and to avoid encouraging negative perceptions of the quality of life of persons who are elderly, ill or disabled;

Whereas vulnerable persons must be protected from being induced, in moments of weakness, to end their lives;

Whereas suicide is a significant public health issue that can have lasting and harmful effects on individuals, families and communities;

Whereas, in light of the above considerations, permitting access to medical assistance in dying for competent adults whose deaths are reasonably foreseeable strikes the most appropriate balance between the autonomy of persons who seek medical assistance in dying, on one hand, and the interests of vulnerable persons in need of protection and those of society, on the other;

Whereas it is desirable to have a consistent approach to medical assistance in dying across Canada, while recognizing the provinces’ jurisdiction over various matters related to medical assistance in dying...

Whereas persons who avail themselves of medical assistance in dying should be able to do so without adverse legal consequences for their families — including the loss of eligibility for benefits — that would result from their death;

Whereas everyone has freedom of conscience and religion under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*;

Whereas nothing in this Act affects the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religion.” **How beautifully said. Thank you, Canada.**

In memoriam: Marilyn Ross Adams, 1937-2016

Marilyn Ross Adams, board member of Final Options Illinois, and my spouse and life partner of 38 years, died on April 12, of acute leukemia. She was 78.

Marilyn was a pioneering feminist of her generation, and an activist and tireless campaigner for many causes, including peace, safe energy, environmental protection, and human rights, especially abortion rights and the right to aid in dying. She was a woman of extreme compassion, with a tremendous passion for justice. Professionally, she had

We're in the U of C Magazine

From a letter by FOI members Ed Gogol, Ken Leonard and Nancy Yalowitz, published in the Spring 2016 *University of Chicago Magazine*.

"It's a controversial subject, but ultimately very simple. The diseases that kill us often cause immense, unbearable pain and suffering. Palliative care, though wonderful, is often limited in its ability to relieve that suffering. Faced with the likelihood of an agonizing death many of us will desire to skip the final stages. It's not easy to die...In many cases, death comes as a mercy.

We believe that terminally ill, mentally competent adults must have the legal right to choose to cut their suffering short. We must have the legal right to obtain the means to a peaceful, dignified, humane, and pain-free death. And our physicians and loved ones must have the legal right to provide assistance.

There is ferocious opposition to the establishment of this basic human right as there has been to all human rights movements. Much of this is motivated by religious dogma. Persons taking this position should be requested not to impose their religious beliefs on others who don't share them. Knowing that the theological argument will not convince many, opponents typically fall back to the trope that establishing the right to aid in dying will create a slippery slope..." but "the legal change we seek is explicit. No one qualifies just because of age or disability. You must be terminally ill. And the multiple layers of safeguards work: in 20 years of experience with the Oregon law, there has not been a single such case."

several careers, especially in the fields of marketing communications. She was a world-class copy editor and shaper of marketing messages, and was obsessed with helping the nonprofit organizations she cared so much about.

In addition to various corporate jobs, her extensive resume included stints with the American Civil Liberties Union, Citizens for a Better Environment, agencies of the City of Chicago during the administration of progressive mayor Harold Washington, Hull House, and Solar Service Inc. She claimed partial credit for stopping an ill-conceived plan to build an airport in Lake Michigan, and came up with the campaign's slogan, "Don't Do It In the Lake!"

Marilyn was a font of wisdom to her large circle of friends, relatives and colleagues. She was generous and touched many lives. Devastated by the death of her beloved son Ross from melanoma in 2001, she slowly recovered, and helped many others through their grief. Besides me, she is survived by her daughter, Meredith, and four grandchildren. Her loss leaves a large hole in our hearts, and an obligation to carry on her work.

-- Ed Gogol

About Final Options Illinois

Founded in 1984, **Final Options Illinois** is working to establish the right to aid-in-dying for all mentally competent adults who are suffering intolerably and irremediably. Our original name was **Hemlock of Illinois**.

We support all three major national groups working to advance the right to aid in dying: **Compassion & Choices**, the **Death With Dignity National Center**, and **Final Exit Network**. Our website has links to all three of these wonderful groups.

Please join us. Please mail tax-deductible membership contributions to the address below, or contribute securely online. Thank you.

Web: www.finaloptionsillinois.org.

Email: info@finaloptionsillinois.org

Twitter: [@FinalOptionsIL](https://twitter.com/FinalOptionsIL)

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August 2016
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A Chicago Man's Wish:

'I pray to God that he takes me soon.'

By Miguel Carrasquillo

"I just want to die in peace ...
Living in agony is the hardest party of dying ...
I can't bear this pain any longer ...
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Please authorize medical aid in dying as an end-of-life option."

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Our doctors can help us die – if we'd only let them.

Free showings of the award-winning film

"How To Die in Oregon"

Sunday, August 28 – 1:30 pm

At the Sulzer Regional Library, 4455 North Lincoln Avenue, Chicago

Sunday, September 25 – 1:30 pm

At the Hinsdale Library, 30 East Maple Street, Hinsdale

A Chicago man's wish: 'I pray to God that He takes me soon'

By Miguel Carrasquillo

Note: Mr. Carrasquillo, a 35-year old Chicagoan, died in June 2016 in Puerto Rico, where he was being cared for by his parents. This essay was published in the Chicago Tribune on April 15, 2016.

I just want to die in peace.

Don't get me wrong. I love life. I want to continue my career as a professional chef. I want to swim in the ocean, take family cruises and eventually get married, but a brain tumor is ending my life slowly and painfully.

I simply want the option to die without suffering. I want to spare my family the horrors they see me experience today.

I have endured excruciatingly painful treatments to try to cure the brain tumor that has invaded my body. Doctors estimate I have a few months to live.

Living in agony is the hardest part of dying.

I was only 30 years old when doctors diagnosed me with a glioblastoma five years ago. Since then, I have undergone countless treatments and multiple surgeries, only to learn there is no medicine that can cure my illness.

Today, I endure agonizing headaches, back pains, electric shocks all over my body and seizures that leave me bed-ridden with bruises from my falls. **The morphine pouch connected to my sciatic nerve does very little to alleviate my pain.**

I want the option to self-ingest medication to end this intolerable suffering.

Having this option of medical aid in dying would ease my mind because I would be able to pass peacefully at home, holding my mother's hand, surrounded by my father, my sisters and my tricolored beagle named Lucy.

Unfortunately, medical aid in dying is not a legally authorized option in my home state of Illinois or in Puerto Rico, where my Catholic parents are taking care of me during the final stage of my life.

I pray to God that He takes me soon. I can't bear this pain any longer.

But before I die, I have a few requests:

**** Legislators in every U.S. state and territory:**

Please authorize medical aid in dying as an end-of-life option. Dying people in intractable pain have no viable options other than to go back and forth to hospitals, where they poke us over and over, where they give us more pills and connect us to machines that prolong our dying process. I am tired of fighting.

**** Doctors:** I urge you to listen and to honor your patients' end-of-life wishes, whether you agree with them or not.

**** My fellow Latinos:** I ask you to break the cultural taboo of discussing death and medical aid in dying. Talking about death is one of the most important conversations we should have, whether we are dying or not. Terminally ill people should not have to endure needless pain; instead they should be able to see a doctor to request a prescription for medication to end their suffering. Latinos need to stop worrying about being judged. We need to advocate for laws authorizing the option of medical aid in dying.

**** My fellow Americans:** Please call your legislators, write e-mails and tell them you support laws to authorize medical aid in dying.

**** My brothers and sisters in Christ:** Please stop referring to medical aid in dying as a sin. I respect those who would make a different decision if they were in my shoes, but I urge you to respect my end-of-life wishes and not impose your values on me.

I've been working as a volunteer advocate with the non-profit organization Compassion & Choices to share my story. I also recently reached out to Dan Diaz, the widower of Brittany Maynard. We spoke about their move from California to Oregon to access its Death With Dignity Act. We spoke about my seizures, my falls and my headaches.

We spoke about Brittany's peaceful death. And the one that I will never have because I am not healthy enough to move to a state where medical aid in dying is authorized. **Geography should not dictate how I die.**



Free Showings of
Sundance Grand Jury Prize Winner
HOW TO DIE IN OREGON

Sunday, August 28, 2016 at 1:30 pm
Sulzer Regional Library, 4455 North Lincoln Avenue, Chicago

Sunday, September 25, 2016 at 1:30 pm
Hinsdale Public Library, 30 East Maple Street, Hinsdale

In 1994, Oregon made it a legal right for people who are dying to cut short their suffering with a doctor's aid. That legal right also exists now in the states of California, Washington, Vermont, and Montana, throughout Canada, and in several European countries.

This fascinating film follows several terminally-ill Oregon residents who take advantage of Oregon's aid-in-dying law. You will see why death-with-dignity laws are so important. Even with the best palliative care, suffering at life's end is sometimes extreme. We all must have the right to choose to hasten our death - to avoid needlessly suffering through the final, agonizing stages of dying. Physicians and loved ones should have the legal right to aid patients without fearing prosecution.

Don't miss this opportunity to see this outstanding film, which won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance in 2011. A discussion will follow the free screening.

The film's sponsor, FINAL OPTIONS ILLINOIS, is working to ensure that mentally competent adults who are suffering intolerably at end of life have the basic human right to choose a peaceful, dignified, humane, and pain-free death. Legal change is needed to secure this human right in Illinois and everywhere.

FINAL OPTIONS ILLINOIS • www.FinalOptionsIllinois.org
info@FinalOptionsIllinois.org • 815-366-7942 or 224-565-1500

Our doctors can help us die ... If we'd only let them !

August 2016

Dear supporters of the right to death with dignity,

Dying is something we're all going to do ... and when we're dying, we become helpless. We come into the world helpless, and we are helpless when we go out of it. But we are a civilized people, a compassionate people. (At least, we should be!) That's why when we're dying, we call on our doctors, our nurses, our caregivers and our loved ones to comfort and support us.

Our doctors are the most important part of the team that comforts us as we die. They, and they alone, have the power to prescribe the medications – especially morphine – that can reduce our pain and suffering. "Palliative care," it's called, and the doctors and nurses that work as part of the palliative care team are usually some of the most wonderful, most compassionate people you'll ever meet. (They have to be, to do their jobs!)

Palliative care is wonderful ... but as we all know, it's limited. The diseases that kill us often cause immense, intolerable, agonizing pain and suffering in their final stages. For many of us, death comes as a mercy. And many of us, if we can just change the laws to allow a choice, will take that choice – will choose to skip our final agonies.

That's where aid in dying laws come in. They allow our doctors to help us die, if we have made that choice. They protect our doctors and our loved ones who have helped us. Without aid-in-dying laws, many of us will have needlessly agonizing deaths. That's what it's all about. It couldn't be more personal ... or more universal.

Please help us advance this right in Illinois, **by sending your most generous contribution to Final Options Illinois today.** Contribute online on our website at www.finaloptionsillinois.org, or mail the form below. Contributions are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Thank you very much.

Ed Gogol, President

PS. The form below shows your most current information as we have it. Please update or correct as needed. In particular, please let us know your most current email address, if you have one. Email is the most economical and timely manner in which we can communicate.

**YES !!!! I support Final Options Illinois.
I want to make aid-in-dying legal everywhere, and especially in Illinois!**

Name: _____

Address: _____ City, St Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Contribution Amount: \$ _____

Check Enclosed Or Please charge my credit card. (Visa or Mastercard)

Card Number: _____

Expiration date: _____

Security Code: _____

(the three-digit number on the back of the card – required for credit card donations)

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