

January 24, 2023 Health, Finance, and Policy Committee

HF1930: End-of-life option established for terminally ill adults

My end of life journey, my end of life process, is **MINE**. If I am of sound mind, no one should have any say in this except **me**. That is what autonomy is: An ability to make one's own end of life decisions. These decisions may not be what others choose and I fully respect that. Medical Aid In Dying is the option I want for myself. I have no idea whether I would ever use it, but I want this option available.

Allow me to tell the story of two starkly contrasting deaths. First was my father who passed in 2013. He was clearly at the end of his very robust life. 98 years old, bedridden, covered in squamous cell cancer lesions, unable to stand, bedsores, medications, morphine, on and on. What he did have was his mind. Two days before he passed, he offered the following to one of his caregivers whom he cherished for her kindness: "I will write you a letter of recommendation." He never got to do it, but his caregiver told me about this offer and I did it. My dad would beg me – "Take me to Oregon". He knew all about Oregon's Death With Dignity law and would have loved to take advantage of it. Instead he died choking on fluid filling his lungs, a Hospice nurse at his side trying desperately with morphine to quiet his choking and obvious pain. Exactly the death my dad didn't want.

Then, in Dec. 2022 there was a similar situation with a close friend. My friend Tom (85), in Hospice care, was dying of severe heart disease, also at the end of life. He lived in a rest home in California and was also nearly bedbound, in pain much of the time, short of breath and

heavily medicated. He learned of California's End of Life Options Act and decided he wanted that option if his suffering became unbearable. It did. Going through California's strict protocols, he was given a prescription for the life ending medication. He picked a day, told his friends and family who were all supportive of his decision. I was there and it was probably one of the most impactful moments of my life. His passing was incredibly peaceful. He said his goodbyes and expressed his love for us, drank the medication, told one last anecdote, went to sleep, and in 20 minutes had passed with family and friends at his side. It was highly emotional as you might expect, incredibly peaceful and this is what he wanted. This was his option.

None of us are getting out here alive. When my time comes, do I want my dad's experience or my friend Tom's experience? I'll tell you what I want and what this legislation will do. I want the option that the Minnesota End of Life Options Act will provide.

Thank you.

Dave Sturgeon

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