



www.deathwithdignity.org

December 4, 2017

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Christopher Coons
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Ranking Member, U.S. House Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

RE: Reject Efforts to Repeal the District of Columbia's Death With Dignity Law
in 2018 Spending Bill

Dear Leaders and Ranking Members:

As you consider the federal spending bill for Fiscal Year 2018, we strongly urge you to reject a House rider that would repeal the District of Columbia's Death with Dignity law. This policy rider is an abuse of the appropriations process, an inappropriate federal usurpation of local authority, and a looming threat to the right to medical aid in dying now enjoyed by citizens in California, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.

In February 2017, the Council of the District of Columbia adopted its Death with Dignity law after extensive debate and with the support of an overwhelming majority of District residents. The law has been fully funded and operational for nearly six months, with information about the law available to D.C. residents, physicians and pharmacists since early June.

In September, the House approved a rider to its FY 18 D.C. Appropriations bill that would repeal the District's medical aid in dying law. The Senate's D.C. funding bill, released in November, contained no

such rider. We respectfully ask you to respect the will of District residents and reject efforts to repeal the District's duly enacted Death With Dignity law.

The threat to medical aid in dying laws is not limited to the District. As a disapproval resolution introduced in the House this year by Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-OH) made clear, the long-term objective of medical aid in dying opponents is banning new Death with Dignity laws nationwide and invalidating them in states where they are already in place. Congressional approval of a budget rider invalidating the District's law would lend momentum to those efforts.

Death with Dignity laws are carefully tailored to allow a narrow class of terminally ill patients the right to choose how they will live their final days. In order to qualify for the program, patients must obtain two physician diagnoses indicating they are going to die within six months and satisfy multiple layers of safeguards. The program is entirely voluntary for patients, doctors and pharmacists.

In 20 years of experience since Oregon adopted this right, medical aid in dying programs have operated flawlessly, affording citizens a degree of control over this most personal decision and producing none of the abuses some opponents once predicted.

These laws enjoy the support of seven in 10 Americans, and public approval extends across demographic groups. In November 2016, for example, Colorado voters approved a Death with Dignity law by a two-to-one margin, with majority support among Republicans, Independents, Democrats and physicians.

We hope you will turn back efforts to take this right away from District residents, and send a signal that Congress will respect the right of states to allow their citizens this option.

For more information on Death with Dignity, go to www.deathwithdignity.org, or feel free to contact me at psandeen@deathwithdignity.org or (503) 228-4415. You can also contact our national strategist, Mark Glaze, at markcharlesglaze@gmail.com or (202) 271-0982.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PS' followed by a flourish.

Peg Sandeen
Executive Director
Death with Dignity National Center