

Attempts to Legalize Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide in the United States

In the United States, Oregon was the first state to legalize physician-assisted suicide. At that time, assisted-suicide advocates predicted that there would be a rapid "domino effect," and other states would soon follow Oregon's lead. But they were wrong. It took fourteen years before another state legalized the practice, and, even then, only after advocates spent a whole year preparing the campaign and raising millions of dollars to insure the victory they so desperately wanted. That state was Washington, the state consultants said was demographically most like Oregon and, therefore, most likely to favor assisted suicide.

But, since Oregon legalized assisted suicide in 1994, other states have rejected assisted-suicide measures, many multiple times. Between January 1994 and March 2011, there were 122 legislative proposals in 25 states. All bills that are not currently pending were either defeated, tabled for the session, withdrawn by sponsors, or languished with no action taken.

Here is a listing, by state, of all the ballot initiatives (since 1991) and all the legislative measures (since 1994) to legalize euthanasia and/or doctor-prescribed suicide in the U.S.

Ballot Initiatives that Passed

Oregon - 1994

Ballot Measure 16 (Oregon Death with Dignity Act) passed on November 8, 1994, by the narrow margin of 51% to 49%. By legalizing physician-assisted suicide, the ballot measure transformed the crime of assisted suicide into a medical treatment.

Washington State - 2008

Ballot Initiative 1000 (Washington Death with Dignity Act) passed on November 4, 2008, by a vote of 58% to 42%. The Washington law is virtually identical to Oregon's assisted-suicide law.

Ballot Initiatives that Were Defeated

Washington State - 1991

Ballot Initiative 119, which would have legalized "aid-in-dying" (euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide), was defeated by a vote of 54% to 46%.

California - 1992

Proposition 161, a ballot initiative that would have legalized euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide failed by a vote of 54% to 46%.

Michigan - 1998

Measure B, which would have legalized physician-assisted suicide, was overwhelmingly rejected by a margin of 71% to 29%.

Maine - 2000

Question 1, the "Maine Death with Dignity Act," patterned after the "Oregon Death with Dignity Act" would have legalized physician-assisted suicide. It was defeated by voters 51% to 49%.

Legislative Measures – January 1994 to March 2011
(Introduced, but not passed)

Alaska

HB 371 (1996)

Arizona

SB 1007 (1996)
HB 2167 (1999)
HB 2454 (2003)
HB 2564 (2004)
HB 2311, HB 2313 (2005)
HB 2372, HB 2357 (2007)
HB 2387 (2008)

California

AB 1080, AB 1310 (1995)
AB 1592 (1999)
AB 654 (2005)
AB 651 (2006)
AB 374 (2007)

Colorado

HB 95-1308 (1995)
HB 96-1185 (1996)

Connecticut

HB 6928, SB 334 (1995)
HB 6083 (1997)
SB 1138 (2009)

Hawaii

SB 2095 (1998)
HB 418, HB 347, SB 981, SB 692, HB 1155,
SB 1037 (1999)
HB 2491, SB 2749, SB 709 (2001)
HB 2487, SB 2745 (2002)
HB 862, SB 391 (2003-2004)
HB 1454, SB 1308 (2005)
HB 3013, SB 2900 (2006)
HB 675, SB 800, SB 1995 (2007)
HB 587, HB 806, SB 1159 (2009)
HB 803, HB 1383, HB 1165 (2011)

Illinois

HB 601, SB 948 (1997)

Iowa

HB 2425 (2006)

Louisiana

SB 128 (1999)

Maine:

HB 552 (1995)
LD 916 (1996)
HB 663 (1997)
IB 3, IB 10 (1999)

Maryland

HB 933, HB 474 (1995)

Massachusetts

H 3173 (1995)
H 1543 (1997)
H 1468 (2009)
H 2233 (2011) [Status pending]

Michigan

HB 4134 (1994)
SB 640 (1995)
SB 653 (1997)
HB 5474 (1998)

Mississippi

HB 1023 (1996)

Montana

SB 167 (2011)

Nebraska

LB 1259 (1996)
LB 406 (1997)
LB 70 (1999)

New Hampshire

HB 339 (1996)
HB 1433-FN (1998)
SB 44 (1999)
HB 304 (2009)
HB 513 (2011)

New Mexico

SB 446 (1995)
HB 814 (2009)

(continued)

New York

S 1683, S 5024-A, A 6333 (1995)
SB 4834 (1999)
SB 677 (2001)

H 168 (2005-2006)

H 44, S 63 (2007)

H 455, S 144 (2009)

H 274 (2011) [Status pending]

Pennsylvania

HB 1435 (2007)
SB 404 (2009)
SB 431 (2011) [Status pending]

Washington

SB 5596 (1995)

SB 6576 (1998)

SB 6843 (2006)

Rhode Island

SB 2985 (1995)
SB 2869 (1998)
SB 2763 (2001)
HB 7428, SB 2766 (2006)
HB 6080 (2007)

Wisconsin

AB 174, SB 90 (1995)

AB 32, SB 27 (1997)

AB 297, SB 124 (1999)

AB 417, SB 184 (2001)

AB 348, SB 169 (2003)

AB 507, SB 224 (2005)

AB 298, SB 151 (2007)

Vermont

H 335 (1995)
H 109 (1997)
H 493 (1999)
H 318, SB 112 (2003-2004)

Wyoming

SB 7 (2004)

For more extensive information about U.S. proposals to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide, see:

"Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide & Health Care Decisions" (2006)

"Assisted Suicide & Death with Dignity: Past, Present & Future" (2004)

"Assisted Suicide: The Continuing Debate" (2002)

"The Art of Verbal Engineering" (1996)

PRC Update (on-line editions from 1996 - present)



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