

Published: 01.20.2005

Bill would legalize suicide as last resort

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX - A right-to-die bill proposed by Democratic lawmakers will likely prompt a debate over suicide, morality and a doctor's role in helping end a patient's life.

Tucson Democratic Rep. Linda Lopez and 17 other Democrats support a bill that would legalize suicide in some cases.

House Bill 2313 would give patients diagnosed as likely to die within six months the right to request lethal medication they could administer themselves.

"It's a last-resort measure, and it's only meant for extreme cases," said John Abraham, executive director of End of Life Choices Arizona. "If people are faced with nothing but suffering and inevitable death, then it's their right to determine when, where and how to end their life."

Despite the support, the proposal faces long odds in the GOP-controlled Legislature. Lopez pursued similar legislation two years ago.

Rep. Doug Quelland, R-Phoenix, who chairs the House Health Committee, hasn't committed to hearing the measure.

Also, the Arizona Medical Association, which represents more than 5,000 physicians, opposes it.

Modeled on Oregon's Death with Dignity law, the bill would require patients to request the lethal medicine in writing. They would also undergo psychiatric or psychological testing.

Gov. Janet Napolitano said Wednesday that she wasn't familiar with the bill and wouldn't comment on it.

Another proposal by Lopez, House Bill 2311, would let terminally ill patients control how much pain medication they can take rather than just following doctors' orders.

She said doctors have a responsibility to help patients alleviate pain. But while the bill aims to ease pain, Lopez acknowledged patients could use pain medicine to end their lives.

How to comment

- Legislative switchboard in Phoenix: 1-800-352-8404.
- Tucson satellite office: 398-6000.
- Internet: www.azleg.state.az.us

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