

[Home](#) AP Nation / World

AP California News

Aug 18, 7:56 PM EDT

California governor balks at push to eye right-to-die bill

By FENIT NIRAPPIL
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) -- California lawmakers on Tuesday announced a second attempt at passing right-to-die legislation this year after an earlier measure stalled amid religious opposition and hesitant Democrats.

The new bill allowing doctors to prescribe terminally ill patients life-ending drugs was introduced in a special legislative session on health care financing convened by Gov. Jerry Brown.

The governor, however, said through spokeswoman Deborah Hoffman that the session is not the appropriate venue to consider the issue. A better approach would be to reconsider previous legislation next year that is now stalled, she said.

The renewed push comes after at least two dozen states have introduced aid-in-dying legislation this year, though none has passed. Doctors are permitted to prescribe life-ending drugs in Oregon, Washington, Vermont and Montana.

The right-to-die movement has been galvanized by the high-profile case of 29-year-old Brittany Maynard, a California woman with brain cancer who moved to Oregon to legally take her life.

She argued in widely viewed online videos that she should have been able to access life-ending drugs in her home state.

"Californians should have more options available to those suffering constantly other than moving to other states or living in constant pain," Assemblyman Luis Alejo, D-Watsonville, said Tuesday at a news conference.

Religious groups and advocates for people with disabilities opposed a nearly identical California bill introduced earlier this year, saying it goes against the will of God and put terminally ill patients at risk for coerced death. The measure passed the state Senate but stalled in the Assembly.

Opponents said Tuesday that the new bill was a heavy-handed attempt to skirt the legislative process.

The governor called the special session to address funding shortfalls for a home health aide program for Medi-



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli



Cal, the state's health insurance for the poor.

However,, some lawmakers are trying to use it to advance other contentious health care legislation.

"It is particularly troubling that in this rush to judgment, proponents are linking this bill with health care financing," said Tim Rosales, a spokesman for Californians Against Assisted Suicide, which includes groups advocating for Catholics, oncologists and people with disabilities. "That should be truly frightening to those on MediCal and subsidized health care, who quite logically fear a system where prescribing suicide pills could be elevated to a treatment option."

Debbie Ziegler, Maynard's mother, criticized religious groups, including the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, for lobbying against the bill.

"What right does anyone of a specific religious faith have to say I should act in accordance with their fate in my death?" she said.

Advocates also have turned to courts, where they faced recent defeats in New Mexico and San Diego, where a judge said the issue should be resolved by state lawmakers.

Elizabeth Wallner, a single mother with Stage 4 colon cancer who filed a lawsuit that prompted the San Diego ruling, urged lawmakers to allow people like her to have a peaceful death at home.

"I don't want my son's last image to be of me struggling and in pain," she said.

The earlier California bill stalled in the Assembly Health Committee when Sens. Lois Wolk of Davis and Bill Monning of Carmel could not get support from fellow Democrats who lost parents to cancer and who were uncomfortable with allowing patients to kill themselves.

The new bill by Assemblywoman Susan Eggman, D-Stockton, would bypass that committee.

Christian Burkin, a spokesman for Eggman, says terminally ill patients who want the option to end their lives can't wait and the special session would allow a thorough review of the issue.

The right-to-die advocacy group Compassion and Choices has said it would attempt to qualify a 2016 ballot measure if they lose in the Legislature.

Follow Fenit Nirappil on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/FenitN> .

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed. Learn more about our [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Use](#).



News

[Local](#) / [Tuolumne](#) / [Calaveras](#) / [Sports](#) / [Business](#) / [Stocks](#) / [News or Record](#) / [State](#) / [Nation/World](#) / [Obituaries](#) / [Submit News](#) /  [RSS](#)

Opinion

[Editorials](#) / [Letters](#) / [Submit a letter](#)