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### Death on Your Terms

In January of 2014, 29-year old Brittany Maynard was diagnosed with a form of brain cancer. After having undergone surgery, the cancer returned and the prognosis turned terminal. Brittany was told she would have 6 short, yet long and agonizing months to live. Knowing the path she was to face ahead of her, she explored all options for her passing and deemed physician-assisted death to be the most desirable. Maynard and her family picked up and established new lives in Oregon, 1 of the 4 states in which physician-assisted death was legal at the time. On November 1, 2014, Brittany Maynard ended her life on her own terms. Unfortunately, many terminally ill patients do not have this same opportunity, as 45 states remain without laws that authorize this type of passing. If this were you, a family member, or a loved one, wouldn't the option of physician-assisted death seem viable and fair? Physician-assisted death should be legal and available in all states to those who meet the particular conditions.

In order to qualify for physician-assisted death, one must be terminally ill and have a prognosis of 6 months or less to live. This qualification is critical. It regulates the number of patients who can choose physician-assisted death, and prevents those who can live a longer life from ending it too soon. An essential benefit of this method is that it allows the patient to be autonomous. At a time when a person's body is rapidly failing and taking with it aspects of human life that are frequently taken for granted, it gives the patient a sense of empowerment. They cannot control their illness and the effects it has, but they can control the circumstances of their death and, correspondingly, the amount of pain they will endure. Another benefit is related to the case of Brittany Maynard, that which involves the Oregon Death With Dignity Act. This allows for the authorization of physician-assisted death in the state of Oregon. As suggested by

the title of the Act, taking one's life in this manner allows for the preservation of one's dignity. Often times terminal illnesses are debilitating and detrimental to the patient's self. They likely want to be remembered in a way that is true to whom they were pre-illness, not who they were as a result of the illness. Physician-assisted death offers an alternative that can preserve the very essence of the individual, as well as his/her dignity.

Many of the opponents of this form of death have arguments grounded in ethics. They think that regardless of the circumstances, assisting the death of a patient is wrongful. They believe it is the moral and lawful responsibility of the physician to help aid the patient. What these adversaries may fail to realize is that in helping the patient die upon request, the physicians are doing just that, helping. They are providing the patient with the care they need and want, even if that care should be to end their life.

In order to provide individuals who are terminally ill with the life-ending option of physician-assisted death, we must act. Compassion and Choices is a nonprofit organization that aims to help people experience death under good circumstances. As stated on their website, they "work to protect and expand options at the end of life" through the changing of attitudes and policies. Donating to this organization will allow for the improvement of their services. Becoming a member or volunteering your time will also help to provide patients with more self-governing end-of-life options. Simple advocacy of the cause will aid the progression of the legal process, as it will be backed by far more supporters. Physician-assisted death can be the light at the end of the tunnel for those who are terminally ill. This method must be legalized in all 50 states in order to provide those who are eligible with that choice.