

compassion & choices

MAGAZINE
FALL 2018

Hawai'i Authorizes
Medical Aid in Dying

.....

Setting Our
New Strategy

.....

California Law
in Peril

.....

Five Questions for
Mauricio Ochmann

*The actor and activist discusses the importance of
end-of-life options for his state and the Latino community*

Meet Frayda and Ken Levy. As part of our growing major donor community, they generously contribute to our work to transform decision-making and care for the end of life. We are grateful for their support and confidence that their investment in us will help make the world a better place.



To learn more about our major donor program, please contact Linda Roth Platt at 202.818.8261 or lrothplatt@CompassionAndChoices.org.

Investing in the Future of the End-of-Life Movement

“

My husband and I support Compassion & Choices because we believe in choice – and feel immense empathy for anyone spending their last weeks or months in agony. More and more doctors are realizing the humane medical treatment is to help patients end their suffering.

– Frayda and Ken Levy, New Jersey

”





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Compassion & Choices improves care, expands options and empowers everyone to chart their own end-of-life journey. Learn more at [CompassionAndChoices.org](https://www.compassionandchoices.org).



What an eventful six months since I started in my role as CEO! Through the ups and downs, bumps and boosts we've been through in this time, I'm gratified to know that all of it moves us forward in some way. In this issue, you'll read

about Compassion & Choices' recent flurry of action and advances, including:

- » Authorizing medical aid in dying in Hawai'i, followed by the immediate launch of our access campaign.
- » Supporting legislation in 23 other states.
- » Winning a Terri Schiavo-like court case in California.
- » Protecting the Washington, D.C., law from congressional overreach and reducing the regulatory roadblocks so patients are now able to access the law.
- » Reinstating the law in California after a superior court judge invalidated it.
- » Blocking efforts by the American Medical Association to reaffirm an oppositional policy.
- » Adding two new talented and committed national board members.
- » Charting a strong course forward with our new strategic plan.

You'll also hear from Mauricio Ochmann, a celebrated actor and member of our Latino Leadership Council, who is helping our efforts.

I hope you come away sharing my belief that solidarity around end-of-life choice offers us a glimmer of hope in a highly polarized world. History will demonstrate we are on the right side of humanity, dignity and the law. With your support, we are unstoppable.

Thank you for standing with us,

Kim Callinan
Chief Executive Officer

Managing Editor
Bonnie Lawhorn

Art Director
Bhavna Kumar

Staff Writers

Brandi Alexander
Sonja Aliesch
Sean Crowley
Patricia A. González-Portillo
Jessie Koerner
Alyson Lynch
Tina Posterli
Katie Wingo

Contributors

Kim Callinan
Barbara Coombs Lee

Production Manager
Alyssa Cowan

Advertising, Rights & Permission

CompassionAndChoices.org
Magazine@CompassionAndChoices.org
101 SW Madison Street, Unit 8009
Portland, OR 97207

Postmaster

Send address changes to: Compassion & Choices
101 SW Madison Street, Unit 8009
Portland, OR 97207

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words & pictures

The Houston Chronicle

"Educating and Empowering African-Americans About End-of-Life Care"

bit.ly/CCHouston

Brandi Alexander, Compassion & Choices' national constituency director, wrote about her father's difficult end-of-life experience and how African-Americans are less likely to have conversations about their end-of-life goals. She stated, "It is critical that our community begin focusing on advance care planning about the end-of-life care options, including educating ourselves about the value of hospice and palliative care." The piece ran in 47 newspapers nationwide, including the Houston Chronicle, the Philadelphia Inquirer and the San Antonio Express-News.

The Washington Post

"A Year After D.C. Passed Its Controversial Assisted Suicide Law, Not a Single Patient Has Used It"

bit.ly/DCLaw

The D.C. Death with Dignity Act, despite being in effect for more than a year, has not yet been utilized by any D.C. resident. Compassion & Choices National Director of Policy and Programs Kat West explained to the Washington Post: "Especially in the first year, there's usually a lot of interest in learning ... about these laws. That, we think, has been really dampened and discouraged in D.C. because of ... [overly complicated] administrative rules."

The Economist

"Alohas and Goodbyes: The Assisted-Dying Movement Gathers Momentum in America"

bit.ly/EOLMovement

The Economist reported on Hawai'i becoming the eighth jurisdiction to authorize medical aid in dying in the United States. Compassion & Choices Chief Executive Officer Kim Callinan attributed the authorization of the last four jurisdictions in less than three years to numerous factors, including the aging of the baby boomer generation. "They're starting to see their parents experience horrible deaths and are beginning to contemplate their own ends," she said.

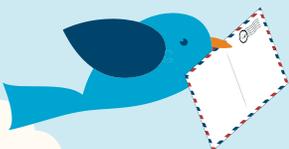
El Diario

"Debate Assisted Death Law in New York City"

bit.ly/CCNY2018

El Diario reported on a New York State Assembly hearing on the Medical Aid in Dying Act held in New York City. Guillermo Chacón, president of the Latino Commission on AIDS and founder of the Hispanic Health Network, testified at the hearing that medical aid in dying gives a terminally ill person "the option to close the cycle of his life with greater dignity." The most recent national poll of Hispanics' opinions on medical aid in dying showed 69 percent support such laws.

It's Official CHANGE OF ADDRESS



Hello!

Our mailing address has changed from Denver, Colorado to Portland, Oregon.

Please make a note of it!

NEW MAILING ADDRESS:

Compassion & Choices
101 SW Madison St.
Unit 8009
Portland, OR 97207

The Future Starts Now: Compassion & Choices' New Strategic Plan

Rapid achievement of our prior goals necessitates a new roadmap.

Given Compassion & Choices' incredible success since adopting our last strategic plan in July 2013 — most notably passing and defending medical aid-in-dying laws in California, Colorado and Washington, D.C. — the board of directors saw the wisdom of developing a new strategic plan one year earlier than scheduled. Since that decision, we have succeeded in authorizing medical aid in dying in Hawai'i, further demonstrating our need to accelerate the plan.

To ensure our new plan fully represents the interests and expertise of our supporters, we embarked on a six-month collaborative strategic planning process. During this process, we called on a diverse committee of advocates, industry leaders and community members to help guide the initiative and offer input. We also spoke with and surveyed thousands of supporters nationwide.

With the collective wisdom of this network, we created the strategic



plan — a bold roadmap to position Compassion & Choices for success over the next five to 10 years. We will know we've succeeded when we realize our vision for the future: a society that affirms life and accepts the inevitability of death, embraces expanded options for compassionate dying, and empowers everyone to choose end-of-life care that reflects their values, priorities and beliefs.

We've refocused our strategies to educate the public and healthcare professionals, empower people

to take charge of their healthcare, advocate for expanded end-of-life options around the country, and defend end-of-life choice from legal and legislative threats.

We have set our sights on several lofty long-term objectives, including perhaps the most ambitious one: making sure that, within 10 years, medical aid in dying is an open and accessible medical practice for half the U.S. population. With our collective efforts, this is completely doable.

EDUCATE



EMPOWER



ADVOCATE



DEFEND



California Law in Peril

Although Compassion & Choices and the attorney general succeeded in restoring access to the End of Life Option Act, it remains under attack.

The ultimate fate of the California End of Life Option Act stands in legal limbo. Recent rulings by a state judge in Riverside, California — in the lawsuit *Ahn v. Hestrin* seeking to invalidate the law — temporarily shut it down. Thankfully, appeals court rulings in motions filed by two terminally ill adults and a physician represented by Compassion & Choices reinstated the law. A stay was also granted the same day in a related case brought by Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

As a result, physicians are once again able to write prescriptions for aid-in-dying medication to terminally ill adults who qualify under the California End of Life Option Act ... for now. In other words, eligible Californians will be able to access medical aid in dying pending further review by the courts.

This victory is only the beginning of what is likely to be a long legal battle in what is already a 2-year-old case. Winning this case in California will be expensive and time-consuming, possibly taking several more years to resolve, because the lower court has ruled on only one of the plaintiffs' claims: that the state Legislature violated the state constitution by passing the law during a special session limited to healthcare.

The plaintiffs also claim the law violates the due process and equal protection guarantees of the California constitution because it fails "to make rational

distinctions 'between terminally ill adults' and the vast majority of Californians not covered by the Act." In short, even if the appeals court and state supreme court dismiss the special session claim, the case may be sent back to the lower court to resolve the other claims and then appealed to higher courts again.

"This stay is a huge win for many terminally ill Californians with six months or less to live, because it could take years for the courts to resolve this case," explains Compassion & Choices National Director of Legal Advocacy Kevin Díaz, who continues to work vigorously on the case. "Thankfully, this ruling settles the issue for the time being, but we know we have a long fight ahead before we prevail."



Actor and Compassion & Choices Latino Leadership Council member Mauricio Ochmann, who appears on the cover of this issue, visits terminally ill advocate Matt Fairchild in California in June, as both fight to get the End of Life Option Act reinstated. Read more about Mauricio and Matt on page 14.

Hawai'i Makes Eight!

After 20 years of diligent efforts by Compassion & Choices and local advocates in both the courts and Legislature, Hawai'i joins seven other U.S. jurisdictions in authorizing medical aid in dying.

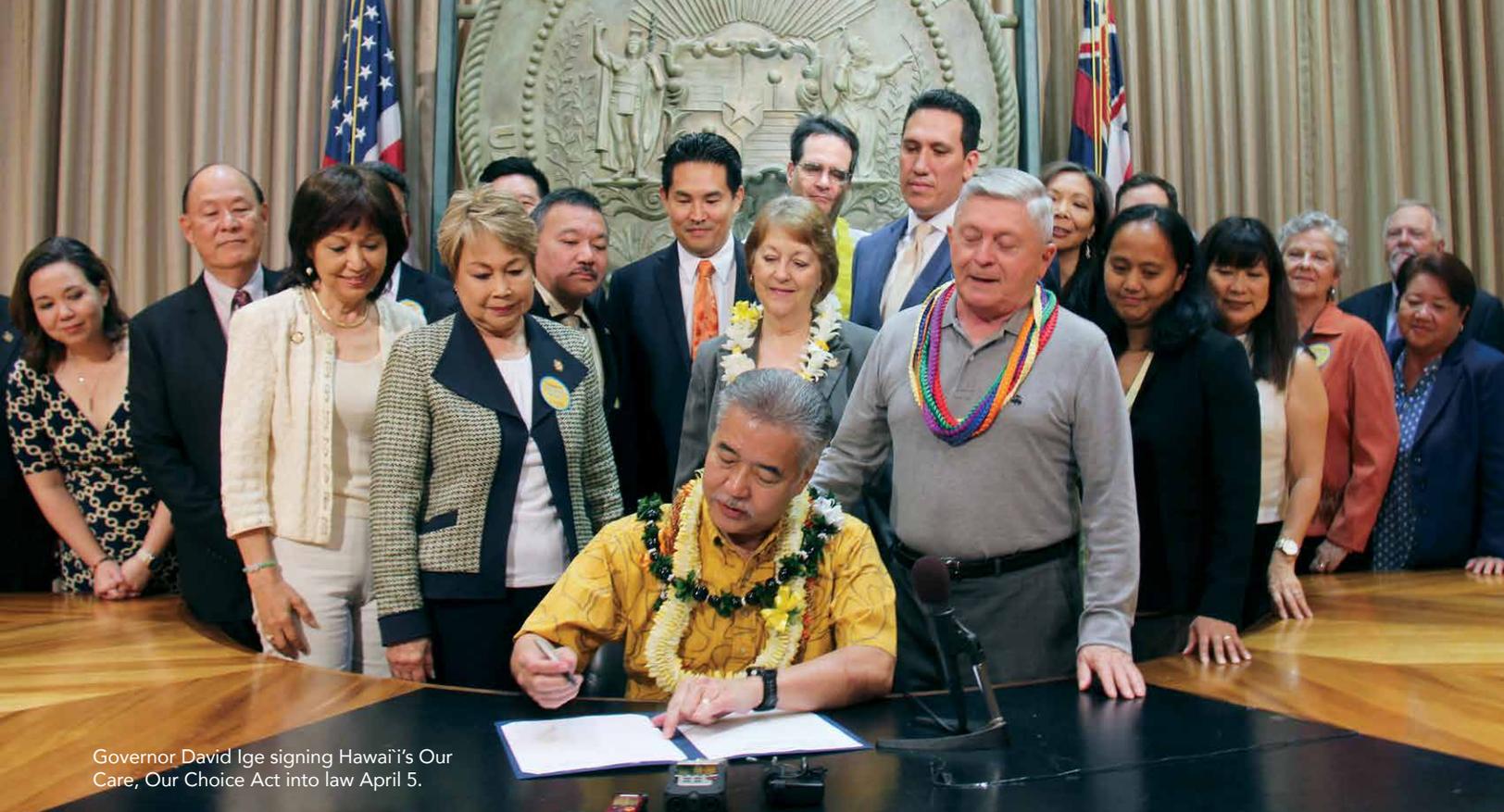
On April 5, 2018, Compassion & Choices celebrated a major success when Hawai'i became the eighth jurisdiction to authorize medical aid in dying. Cheers broke out as Governor David Ige signed into law HB2739, the Our Care, Our Choice Act, giving terminally ill Hawai'i residents the option to choose medical aid in dying to peacefully end unbearable suffering.

The victory was decades in the making. It all started in 1998, when Compassion & Choices first began working in the state, laying the foundation to build the phenomenal network of more than 5,000 volunteers, physician advocates, storytellers, supporters and other allies who helped make medical aid in dying a visible and increasingly urgent cause for the majority of Hawai'i residents.

This legislative session, the decades of building visibility and support finally paid off. Our team on the ground — composed of public relations experts, Hawai'i's top lobbyists, pro bono attorneys, grassroots organizers, and hundreds of volunteers and advocates — joined forces with our national staff and others, and together we were unstoppable. Our winning strategy included:

- » Working closely with the bill sponsors to review the legislation and proposed amendments, with a keen focus on how the revisions would impact a patient's ability to access the law.
- » Filing a lawsuit on behalf of Compassion & Choices, patient advocate John Radcliffe and Dr. Charles Miller to explicitly authorize medical aid in dying, which created additional awareness of the urgent need for expanded end-of-life options.
- » Leading grassroots efforts, including gathering over 500 petitions, hosting information booths, presenting and exhibiting at conferences, and organizing multiple public education forums to a packed 200-seat Capitol auditorium.
- » Generating a constant drumbeat of compelling media coverage including news of a Compassion & Choices survey of Hawai'i residents, which demonstrated 80 percent support for the law; an op-ed authored by four former Hawai'i governors urging passage of the law; countless letters to the editor and op-eds by our storytellers; reports on our lawsuit; the ongoing legislative efforts; and much more.





Governor David Ige signing Hawai'i's Our Care, Our Choice Act into law April 5.

- » Reaching out to over a dozen key allied health organizations to garner support for medical aid in dying, which contributed to endorsements by the ACLU of Hawai'i, Planned Parenthood, Hawai'i State Teachers Organization - Retired and the neutrality of the Hawai'i Medical Association.
- » Working with the legislative sponsors to plan and execute five committee hearings, which included powerful testimony from Compassion & Choices Policy Director Kat West and over 100 storytellers and supporters.
- » Working the halls of the Legislature with the gravitas of two of the best lobbyists in Hawai'i and dozens of volunteers conducting over 100 legislative visits until lawmakers felt enough public pressure to pass our bill.

HB2739 was approved by veto-proof majorities in both houses of the Legislature: 39-12 in the House and 23-2 in the Senate, and signed into law by Governor Ige on April 5.

Standing with Governor Ige when the legislation was signed was John Radcliffe, a longtime advocate for medical aid-in-dying legislation and lead plaintiff in

our Hawai'i court challenge, who is living with terminal stage 4 colon and liver cancer. "I am grateful that I have lived to see this day, and I salute Governor Ige, our lawmakers, other advocates, volunteers and allied organizations for their work throughout the years to finally bring this option to Hawai'i," he said.

Before the ink was dry, Compassion & Choices turned to the next challenge: making sure residents are informed about the law, and physicians and health-care facilities embrace their roles in implementing it. Within weeks of the bill signing, we launched the Hawai'i Access Campaign to ensure all Hawai'i residents and healthcare professionals have the information they need to successfully navigate and apply the law when it goes into effect on January 1, 2019.

We have found through our work in California, Colorado and other authorized jurisdictions that prompt attention to meticulous implementation is a necessary step in the process of integrating medical aid in dying into standard medical care. Early signs in Hawai'i are overwhelmingly positive, with several health systems already adopting supportive policies.

Compassion & Choices Wins Terri Schiavo-Like Case

A Los Angeles judge rules that 37-year-old Juan Fernando Romero's wife Ana — sued by his sister with assistance from Life Legal Defense Foundation — had the authority to remove him from life support.

Fifteen months after Juan Fernando Romero's sister sued his wife, Ana Romero, for control of his end-of-life care, a judge ruled that Ana had the legal right to end treatment to artificially prolong Fernando's life.

Fernando had suffered severe brain damage that left him in a permanent vegetative state. Compassion & Choices and several of its pro bono private attorneys successfully represented Ana Romero in the case.

The Los Angeles Times noted in a front-page story:

The case is reminiscent of the Terri Schiavo case in Florida in which her husband sought to disconnect life support and her parents fought him for years in the courts in a highly publicized and prolonged series of legal challenges.

In the Romero case, the judge noted that Juan Fernando Romero had discussed with his wife the issue of not prolonging death. "Not one member of Juan Fernando's immediate family (mother, father, sisters) ever discussed with him what his wishes were if he was in a permanent vegetative state, bedridden, and unable to recover or communicate," [Judge Mary Thornton] House noted of the testimony.

...

"I am thankful for the judge's ruling validating my judgment to follow my husband's preferences," said Ana. "But tragically this lawsuit prevented me from honoring my husband's preferences for his end-of-life care, so he needlessly lingered for another six months before he died."

"Ana Romero could have decided to drop this case after her husband died to focus on her role as a single mother of their two young children and sole family breadwinner," said Jonathan Patterson, one of her lawyers and staff attorney for Compassion & Choices, an end-of-life care advocacy group. "But she bravely battled on to ensure Juan Fernando's tragedy served a greater purpose to benefit others, by discouraging similar lawsuits that only cause pain and suffering for everyone involved."



Ana Romero and her late husband, Juan Fernando Romero.

A Day of Compassion in D.C.

Ongoing advocacy leads to easier access in the District of Columbia.



Rev. Charles McNeill speaking at Compassion & Choices' "Day of Compassion" rally in front of the John Wilson building.

On December 19, 2016, Mayor Muriel Bowser signed the Washington, D.C., Death with Dignity Act into law. It became effective February 18, 2017. In the year since, not a single terminally ill person has been able to use it. The primary reason: burdensome regulations imposed by the D.C. Department of Health that present unnecessary barriers for patients and extra reporting requirements for doctors and pharmacists. The requirements exceeded those outlined in the law and those created to implement similar laws in other states.

This is not what supporters and legislators had in mind when they fought to pass the Death with Dignity Act, so Compassion & Choices has taken action. On April 5, 2018, dozens of supporters attended a "Day of Compassion" rally to highlight the problems patients and doctors are having with the implementation process. Volunteers met with D.C. Council members and called on the Department of Health, Mayor Bowser and the Council to get involved.

Print, TV and radio coverage highlighted the concerns and the need to improve implementation.

After this public outcry, the Department of Health agreed to sit down with Compassion & Choices. As a result, the Department changed some of its policies to better accommodate the needs of the District's terminally ill patients and their doctors. The Department renewed efforts to notify doctors, pharmacists and medical facilities that the Death with Dignity Act is in effect and that a portal exists on the Department website where they can learn more. Also, language was removed that would create a patient and doctor registry and mandate excessive doctor and patient education requirements. We are pleased that as a result of these efforts, doctors are now prescribing and patients are able to access the law. In addition, Sibley Memorial Hospital and Vitas Hospice have both adopted supportive policies. Much more work needs to be done, but this is a significant step forward.

Protecting End-of-Life Choice

Opposition Efforts To Overturn Laws Once Again Thwarted

For the third time, Compassion & Choices is working to defend the **Washington, D.C.**, law from congressional overreach. In July, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to pass an appropriations bill that includes a rider to repeal D.C.'s Death with Dignity Act. We are currently organizing federally and across the country to urge the U.S. Senate to reject the policy rider.

We also defeated legislative attempts to significantly weaken the laws in Colorado and California. In **Colorado**, the opposition tried to bring forward legislation that would add burdensome regulatory roadblocks, making it difficult for patients to access the law. Fortunately, we were able to squelch our opposition's attempts before the legislation was even introduced!

You can help propel the movement forward and protect the progress we've already made together.

- » **MOTIVATE** your local government to pass a city or county resolution or proclamation in support of medical aid in dying. Find the toolkit at CompassionAndChoices.org/local-resolutions
- » **VOLUNTEER** any way you can; find options at CompassionAndChoices.org/volunteer
- » **DONATE** to help us protect decades of hard-won progress toward self-determination for the terminally ill in our country at CompassionAndChoices.org/donate

In **California**, in February 2018, State Sen. Mike Morrell introduced SB 1336 to add invasive and unnecessary reporting requirements meant to deter physicians from participating in the End of Life Option Act and create barriers for patients to access the law. Compassion & Choices and our supporters sprang into action and quickly organized to oppose SB 1336 at the hearing. Together, we successfully defeated the legislation. Our efforts to protect the California law continue in the courts (see page 5).

Conscience and Religious Freedom Division in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights Sets a Dangerous Precedent

Formed in January, the new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division in the Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights threatens to undermine patient access to end-of-life options, with proposed regulations that would allow providers to impose their own religious beliefs on their patients and opponents to bring cases in support of those beliefs. While providers have the right to opt out of providing healthcare services they object to for reasons of conscience or religious freedom, this would allow a physician to withhold information about anything that they personally find unconscionable, including palliative care, voluntary stopping of eating and drinking, or medical aid in dying. Compassion & Choices submitted comments to the Federal Register and launched an advocacy effort against these proposed regulations. We will continue to fight against this major threat, which would impact people in every state.

Expanding Options

Building Momentum Across the Country

We continue to gain ground at the state and local levels, even as bills to thwart medical aid-in-dying laws persist across the country. This legislative session, in addition to successfully authorizing Hawai'i (see page 6), Compassion & Choices and our 6,000 grassroots volunteers supported legislation in 23 other states across the country and advanced municipal resolutions in several others. This includes providing technical assistance to 244 legislators in 40 states.

Thanks to our strong Compassion & Choices action team, for the first time ever, the bill made it out of committee in **Alaska**! By a 5-2 bipartisan vote, on January 30, 2018, the Alaska Health & Social Services Committee passed HB 54, Terminally Ill: Ending Life Option Act.

In **New York**, Compassion & Choices State Director Corinne Carey and over 45 supporters testified at two hearings on the Medical Aid in Dying Act (A2383/S3151) — one in Albany and one in New York City.

In **Delaware**, we conducted two lobby days, in January 2018 and again in April 2018. Compassion & Choices staff and volunteers contacted every member of the House and most members of the Senate during these well-attended events, helping to build support for medical aid in dying.

In **Connecticut**, Compassion & Choices Director of Policy Ashley Cardenas and Connecticut Campaign Manager Tim Appleton, along with 30 supporters testified at a hearing to advance H.B. 5417, An Act Concerning End-of-Life Care.

On February 8, Compassion & Choices staff were joined by advocates, supporters and family members of deceased New Jerseyans in presenting close to 500 petitions in support of the Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act to Governor Phil Murphy. Our team on the ground then met with nearly every newly elected official to advance the bill. Our collective efforts are paying off! In March, the Judiciary Committee of the **New Jersey** Assembly passed the Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act (A1504/S1072) on a 5-2 vote. The bill is now headed to the full Assembly where we hope to see action in September. Our efforts to build support continue with telephone town halls, local patch-through calls to members and media outreach.

Local Resolutions Paving the Way!

New Mexico, Massachusetts and **Alaska** Compassion & Choices action teams put our latest training guide, "How to Pass a Local Resolution," to good use! In May, the Albuquerque City Council unanimously approved a bipartisan resolution in support of medical aid-in-dying legislation in New Mexico. The Massachusetts team passed municipal resolutions in support of medical aid in dying in four jurisdictions: Lexington, Amherst, Northampton and Falmouth. And the Alaska team passed a resolution through the Girdwood Board of Supervisors! In California, these resolutions served as a critical stepping stone to building the grassroots and political will necessary to ultimately pass the End of Life Option Act.

New Talent Joins the Compassion & Choices Board of Directors



Mark Weideman



Reverend Madison Shockley

We are pleased to announce the addition of two new talented and accomplished professionals to the Compassion & Choices board of directors — Mark Weideman and Reverend Madison Shockley. Both Mark and Madison played important roles in the passage of the 2015 California End of Life Option Act. They are now interested in applying their skills, talents and passion at a national level! Mark, Compassion & Choices' chief California lobbyist, spearheaded the legislative strategy that led to the enactment of California's End of Life Option Act. Madison, a volunteer advocate and spokesperson for Compassion & Choices during the campaign to pass the law, serves on the organization's African-American Leadership Council. **To learn more about Mark and Madison, visit bit.ly/CandCBoard.**

Compassion & Choices Represented at National Academies of Sciences Conference

In February, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine held a two-day workshop titled Physician-Assisted Death: Scanning the Landscape. Kim Callinan, Compassion & Choices CEO, used her position as one of the last speakers in the workshop to clarify several misconceptions. This included setting the record straight about the strong and growing support for medical aid in dying among Latinos and African-Americans. She also pointed out the need to consider the roadblocks and stigma that would result from unnecessary and burdensome data collection efforts. Several other end-of-life choice advocates also spoke at the conference, including Dan Diaz, the husband of Brittany Maynard, and Dr. Omega Silva, professor emeritus of medicine at George Washington University. **To read the full workshop proceedings, visit bit.ly/scanningthelandscape.**

American Medical Association Reconsiders Its Opposition Position

In early June, the American Medical Association (AMA) decided not to reaffirm its position against medical aid in dying, which it has held since 1993. A recommendation by its Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs that the AMA maintain its opposition was rejected in June, with delegates at the annual meeting in Chicago instead voting for the organization to continue reviewing its stance on the issue. Doctors can help us with our medical society efforts by joining our Doctors for Dignity: **CompassionAndChoices.org/doctors-for-dignity.**

Dedicated to Diversity

Compassion & Choices' commitment to growing our movement without barriers has created the opportunity to engage communities and empower more people to make informed end-of-life decisions.

African-American Leadership Council

This February, the newly formed African-American Leadership Council met in person for the first time in Washington, D.C., to continue their work to improve end-of-life care for African-Americans. After a thoughtful discussion, the council visited Capitol Hill to meet with legislators from the Congressional Black Caucus and their staff about protecting D.C.'s Death with Dignity law, and the dangers of the Department of Health and Human Services' new Religious Freedom Division. The evening ended at dinner with Compassion & Choices CEO, board members, supporters and local partners who thanked the council for their dedication. In addition to the council's work, Compassion & Choices is building relationships with various African-American organizations including National Urban League, African American Mayors Association, National Organization of Black Elected Legislative Women, NAACP, National Black Nurses Association and National Newspaper Publishing Association.

Latino Leadership Council

Members of our Latino Leadership Council, united in their desire to expand end-of-life options for the terminally ill, traveled from the San Francisco Bay Area, Miami, New Mexico and Puerto Rico for their first meeting on April 25 at Plaza de Cultura y Artes in Los Angeles. They were joined by Compassion & Choices Chief Executive Officer Kim Callinan, who discussed the strategic plan for 2019 and ways to partner with other Latino organizations. They also spoke with Mariel Garza, editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times, and Alejandro Maciel, editorial director at Hoy Los Angeles/Los Angeles Times en Español, prior to a messaging training provided by Compassion & Choices Media Director Sean Crowley. Members held back tears as they shared

stories of how their loved ones suffered before their deaths. After an emotional day, the council gathered for dinner like one big family.

LGBTQIA Community

We're also advancing awareness in the LGBTQIA community. Compassion & Choices participated in the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance (GLAA) 47th Anniversary and Victory Fund Brunch. We prepared special materials and participated in various Pride celebrations to connect with our supporters from this community.

Faith Outreach

Compassion & Choices is expanding our outreach to faith communities as well. The Minnesota Interfaith Clergy for End-of-Life Options has led 21 presentations since 2015. Its leaders include representatives from Jewish and Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist denominations. In April, the group participated in "Clergy at the Capitol Day," where they met state senators and discussed why people of faith support medical aid in dying.



Members of Compassion & Choices Latino Leadership Council, including (front row from left to right) Nilsa Centeno, Isa Iriarte, María Lemus, María Otero (back row from left to right) Jorge Lambrinos, Dr. Robert Olvera, Dan Diaz.

Five Questions for Mauricio Ochmann

Actor and Compassion & Choices Latino Leadership Council member Mauricio Ochmann has starred in popular telenovelas and films. He was the first Hollywood celebrity to publicly endorse Compassion & Choices' campaign to pass medical aid-in-dying legislation in California, at a time when many Latinos were reluctant to discuss end-of-life issues.

Q: You recently visited Matt Fairchild, who is terminally ill and was fighting to get the End of Life Option Act reinstated in California. What prompted you to do that?

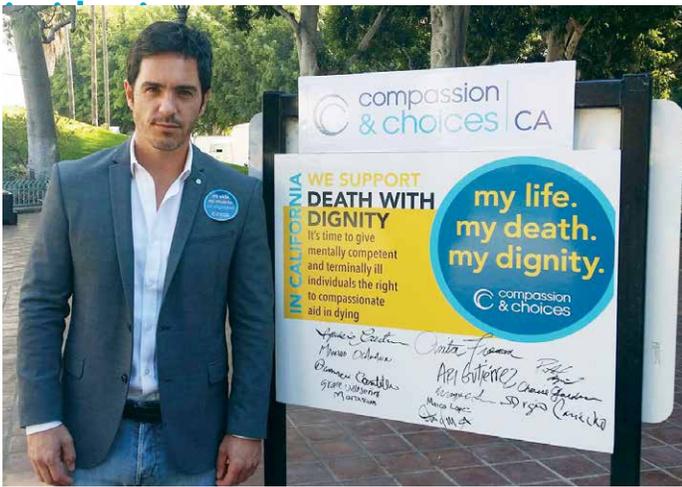
A: I wanted to talk to him, connect with him, so he could know he was not alone and that we were doing everything we could to help. It's so important that terminally people have the option to decide when they feel they have had enough pain. That is why we redoubled our efforts. I am not trying to force this option on anyone. We must put ourselves in the shoes of people like Matt and other terminally ill people before we make any type of judgment.

Q: Have you ever experienced a painful death among your family or friends?

A: Yes, my grandma died of cancer. She was suffering, and everybody was holding on to her. I remember talking to her. I told her it was her time to go. I told her, "Go and be free." A couple of hours later, she let go. Perhaps that is what she needed to hear. People are afraid of letting go. We need to let them go. That is what I want to hear at that point my life.



composition
& choices
Ask me about
end-of-life
options



Mauricio with the giant petition he signed before the launch of the California campaign in 2014.



Congratulations to Mauricio for his upcoming film *Ya Veremos (We'll See)*, which will be released in the fall of 2018.

Q: What caused you to advocate for California's End of Life Option Act?

A: Medical aid in dying caught my attention right away. I was at a point of my life when I was questioning everything, including my beliefs. Now my philosophy is, "This is my life, and I decide what I want to do with it." One of those important matters in life is death. For the last seven to eight years, I have told my family and the people I love that if I am diagnosed with a terminal disease, I will take the pain while it is tolerable. But once it becomes unbearable, I want out. I don't want to go through pain if I am only going to die anyway. If I don't have quality of life, I don't want to live.

Q: Why are end-of-life options so important for Latinos?

A: End-of-life options are of critical importance for Latinos. As Latinos, we learn early on to accept death because of our culture's reverence to celebrate the lives of our beloved dead. However, we are afraid to talk about death itself.

We must honor our dying loved ones in their final days and give them the opportunity to decide the timing and manner of their passing. Allowing mentally capable, terminally ill adults the power of autonomy represents their final decision in a life well-lived.

Q: Can the average person make a difference in advancing end-of-life options legislation, or does it require someone with star power?

A: Without a doubt the average person can make a big difference. It was evident in the case of my fellow Latino, Puerto Rican advocate Miguel Carrasquillo, whose horrific death to brain cancer demonstrated the need for medical aid in dying among Hispanics. Latinos identified themselves with Miguel because he was one of us. We saw Miguel as a son, an uncle. We saw him as our cousin. Latinos saw Miguel as our friend. And we came forward in support.

I am here because of Miguel Carrasquillo and Brittany Maynard. They were average Americans who put a human face to this end-of-life care advocacy campaign that is changing the lives of terminally ill people across the United States and its territories.

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