

# HPACC Special News Report

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## Isle groups rally to fight assisted-suicide bill

*A coalition begins a pre-emptive campaign with newspaper ads*

**By Pat Omandem**

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A coalition of local health care, disability rights and advocacy groups opposed the physician-assisted suicide bill as it began an aggressive lobbying campaign against its passage a week before the legislative session begins Jan. 15.

The group wants to avoid the

close call of last year, when a death-with-dignity bill was defeated by a slim 14-to-11 margin in the state Senate during the closing days of the 2002 session.

It was that sudden and escalating debate on the controversial issue that caught opponents off guard, said Kelly Rosati, coordinator of Hawaii's Partnership for Appropriate & Compassionate Care.

The coalition said yesterday that it plans television, radio and newspaper ads during the next 12 days that oppose the legalization of physician-assisted

suicide. It plans to spend about \$40,000 on this first phase of its lobbying campaign, Rosati said.

"The vote was a shot across the bow," said Rosati, who is also executive director of the Hawaii Family Forum.

Dr. James McKay, a pain specialist, said yesterday that legalization of a death-with-dignity bill is dangerous not only for the dying and their families, but for medicine and society as a whole. He believes doctors can help alleviate a terminal patient's pain and suffering through effective medical therapies rather than by killing

them.

"Killing isn't caring," McKay said. "When I went to medical school, I didn't sign up to kill a patient."

Meanwhile, state Senate Judiciary Chairwoman Colleen Hanabusa (D, Waialae) said she would hold a hearing on the bill if it ends up in her committee. The passage of the measure became a hot-button issue last year after the House approved the measure but a Senate committee chairman refused to hear the bill. That prompted a majority of senators to recall the measure

from committee and debate it on the senate floor before its passage was defeated.

Hanabusa, who favored last year's bill, said she is concerned that the public has a misperception of the death-with-dignity bill. She said the patient has a right to choose because they must first request the lethal prescription, then receive and administer it on their own.

"I think that the issue itself is one that is worthy of having a hearing, and the Legislature should decide as to whether that bill will pass again," Han-

busa said yesterday.

Gov. Linda Lingle said that she agreed with the majority of senators last session who opposed the measure, and that her position on it has not changed, said spokesman Russell Paig.

Legalization of physician-assisted suicide was among a dozen recommendations in 1998 from a blue-ribbon panel convened by former Gov. Ben Cayetano. Since then the state Legislature has enacted some, including living wills and more effective pain management.