

# HAWAII FAMILY FORUM

## Issue Update

### ■ PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE ■

#### OVERVIEW OF EVENTS

During a dramatic three-hour floor session, three Senators (Hogue, Tam, and Kim) switched their vote to hand defeat the so-called death with dignity bill by a vote of 14-11. If they had not done so, Hawaii would have become the second state in the nation, after Oregon, to legalize physician assisted suicide.

#### SENATORIAL VOTE

Several senators, while leaning in favor of the bill, still had serious reservations. Some of those reservations were technical and legal, not philosophical, as in the case of Senator Donna Kim (Moanalua Valley, Aiea, Pearlridge, Kalihi Valley.) She made clear she supports physician-assisted suicide but was not comfortable with many of the details of the bill. Some reservations were philosophical as in the case of Senator Bob Hogue (Kaneohe, Maunawili, Enchanted Lake.) While Senator Hogue wanted to give people the 'choice' they sought in this proposal, he couldn't be sure in his heart that people wouldn't lose their lives due to undue influence and a duty to die. In this end, with life and death in the balance, he had to vote no. Finally, Senator Rod Tam (Downtown, Pauoa, Nuuanu) said all the calls, faxes and e-mails he received made him desire further community deliberation on the topic.

The debate on the Senate floor was remarkable. Senator Jonathon Chun (South Kauai, Niihau) began the discussion with a remarkably comprehensive critique of the bill. Chun, a lawyer, took apart the so-called 'safeguards' in the bill designed to prevent abuse and coercion. He educated his colleagues on the widespread medical and disability rights opposition to the proposal. He warned them of the unintended consequences that could result in innocent loss of life. He reminded them that this was 'life and death' they were deciding in this hurried, 11<sup>th</sup> hour fashion. And he asked them to err on the side of caution and vote no on the measure. Senators Sakamoto (Moanalua, Salt Lake, Foster Village), Slom (Hawaii Kai, Aina Haina), and Hemmings (Kailua, Waimanalo), made eloquent and articulate speeches urging their colleagues to reject the bill.

270 Kuulei Road, #205  
Kailua, HI 96734

Phone: (808) 230-2100 Fax: (808) 230-2102  
E-Mail: [info@hawaiifamilyforum.org](mailto:info@hawaiifamilyforum.org)

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## What You Can Do!

In a shocking admission, Senator Bob Nakata declared “I know there will be errors and people will die unjustifiably” but then vote for the bill. Remarkably, he also cited health care cost containment as a reason to support the bill. For a Senator who prides himself on being a fighter for social justice, his comments left many breathless with disbelief and outrage.

Senators Colleen Hanabusa (Nanakuli, Waianae, Makaha), Matt Matsunaga (Palolo, Waialae, Kahala), Avery Chumbley (East Maui, North Kauai), and Suzanne Chun Oakland (Alewa Heights, Kalihi, Liliha, Nuuanu, Palama, Puunui), rose to make the case in favor of PAS. They declared their belief that people should have the right to exercise this choice about their death. Citing the ‘choice’ of abortion, they declared the state had no compelling reason to deny people this choice at the end of their lives. Thankfully, their arguments didn’t win the day.

### **GRASS ROOTS LOBBYING EFFORTS**

And thankfully, people from all walks of life prayed and called. HFF, along with many other organizations and individuals, alerted everyone within our reach to contact the swing Senators. And contact they did. Many Senators received hundreds of calls. Some of the phone machines were full and turned off. E-mails and faxes poured in.

The bottom line –*people got involved and it made a difference* – a life and death difference. If you are one of those people, please accept our sincere mahalo. Without your prayers and action, there may have been a very different result.

### **ACTION ITEM**

Please do one more thing. Call and thank those who voted no. This issue will be back and we are already meeting with our medical and disability rights allies to formulate a strategy for next year.

SCHEDULE A LEGISLATIVE TRAINING  
WORKSHOP AT YOUR CHURCH.  
CONTACT US AT 230-2100  
TO FIND OUT HOW.

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