



Care and Choice at the End of Life

**Volunteer Action Network
Toolkit:**

**PETITIONS,
TABLING AND
CANVASSING**

Petitions, Tabling and Canvassing

Grassroots organizing is a critical tool in educating the public and building support around medical aid-in-dying and end-of-life issues. As we've seen with many issues in national politics, grassroots momentum in support of, or in opposition to, a law or policy can be extremely powerful. In the case of medical aid-in-dying specifically, grassroots efforts put a face and a voice to an issue that many may know little about.

Contract your local Action Team leaders or C&C field staff to help you coordinate efforts in your area.

Petitions: Grassroots Activism 101

The simplest of political acts, signing a petition, remains among the most important currencies in public policy. Petitions, like letters, are monitored and tracked by public officials and legislative staff, and tallies are kept on the numbers of supporters on all sides of an issue. Strong community support, demonstrated through a large number of petition signatures, can encourage politicians to support an issue or policy.

Below, we offer some basic ideas and best practices for both gathering signatures on petitions for medical aid-in-dying laws and presenting those petitions to your local, state and federal elected officials.

TIP: Copy Compassion & Choices!

Regardless of what kind of petition you are using or whom you are petitioning to, always send a copy of the completed petition to Compassion & Choices so that we can track and aggregate all grassroots activism, add people to our supporters list and amplify your efforts in our meetings with legislators. Send your petitions to Compassion & Choices' Processing Center: PO Box 485, Etna, NH 03750-0485.

What Should My Petition Say?

Use the basic petition in support of medical aid-in-dying laws, which can be found in the Resources section of this toolkit, to ask people for their general support. For petitions on behalf of (or calling for) specific legislation in your state, contact your C&C field staff or your local Action Team leader.

Types of Petitions

Compassion & Choices recommends that you choose between three basic types of petitions, depending upon how you wish to submit the it and whether legislation is under consideration in your state:

- general support petitions
- legislative petitions
- online petitions

In the context of this toolkit, we are NOT talking about official Secretary of State petitions for putting a ballot initiative on a state ballot.

General Support Petitions

Illustrated by the basic petition provided at the end of this guide, general support petitions ask people to offer their signature in general support of the medical aid-in-dying platform, but not for specific legislation. You should be ready to answer basic questions about Compassion & Choices and about medical aid-in-dying if you use this type of petition.

Legislative Petitions

Petitions that support specific medical aid-in-dying legislation or that seek the creation of specific legislation are legislative petitions. It is important to consult C&C before drafting or circulating a legislative petition to ensure you are using the most current and effective language to support end-of-life options in your state. For legislative petitions, you should be able to answer specific questions about the state legislation and to explain your support for its provisions.

Online Petitions

Online petitions can be extremely useful for responding quickly to an event on the ground, such as: Lawmakers voting for or against medical aid-in-dying legislation, a hearing being scheduled, or the city council response to your medical aid-in-dying resolution. [Change.org](https://www.change.org/) provides an easy platform for digital petitioning. As with other petitions, please consult your C&C field staff to ensure you are using the most current and effective language to support end-of-life options in your state.

Successful Petitioning

Regardless of which type of petition you're circulating, remember these simple tips:

- 1. Set a goal.** Even an initial modest goal of 20 signatures will keep you on track. Gather 20, then set a new goal and repeat. Before long, you could have 100 signatures or more to present to your legislator(s), committee, Governor or other official.

- 2. Ask each person individually.** Be sure to ask each person individually to support medical aid-in-dying with their signature. If one person from a group or family signs, ask everyone to sign.
- 3. Be courteous and respectful to everyone.** You will likely encounter people who disagree with your views. If that's the case, resist arguing with them. Thank the person for their time, smile and move on.
- 4. If someone appears to want to avoid you, let them.** Never force an unwelcome interaction. Smile and move on.
- 5. Be ready to answer difficult questions.** You are likely to speak with people who have never considered the issues are petitioning for or have views that differ from yours. Be prepared to provide basic information about medical aid-in-dying, end-of-life issues and any legislation you are supporting. Questions you don't feel comfortable answering can be referred to C&C website at www.compassionandchoices.org.
- 6. Be sure people know you are volunteering for Compassion & Choices.** Wear your yellow C&C shirt and display C&C-branded materials on your table or clipboard.

Challenge Yourself and Others!

Getting 20-100 names on a petition by yourself is a great start. Now think about how to multiply your activism and get some real traction! Identify some like-minded friends and colleagues, and recruit them to join your petition drive!

Here are a few tips on putting together a successful petition effort:

- 1. Make your list.** Identify at least ten people you think might participate.
- 2. Get the word out.** Send an email announcing your petition drive. Attach the petition and provide the basic pointers outlined above for gathering signatures.
- 3. Go social.** Consider expanding your drive to social media by posting on Facebook or Twitter, and asking whether anyone would commit to gathering 20 signatures individually. Have people message you privately so you can send them the petition along with instructions and talking points.
- 4. Set a deadline and a goal.** This will help you create urgency and give your team a target to hit!
- 5. Tell us what you need.** Compassion & Choices can provide pens, yellow T-shirts, literature, stickers etc.

Tabling: Bringing End-of-life Issues to the Community

Tabling and petition-signing go hand in hand. Staffing a table provides an opportunity to bring end-of-life issues into your community in a friendly, visible way. Tabling also gives you a base of operations for your petition drive and allows people to explore the issue, ask questions,

gather information and take home materials. A well-presented table also gives professional brand visibility to C&C and the end-of-life options movement.

Guidelines for Tabling

While tabling is a relatively easy way to gather petition signatures and raise awareness, it still requires some forethought and preparation. Follow these general guidelines for a successful tabling effort, and use the tabling checklist found in the resources section of this toolkit.

- 1. Location, location, location.** Choose the location of your table strategically: Where will you get steady foot traffic? Is there an event, market or park where people will be milling about? Is there a specific population you want to target?
- 2. Private property - ask permission.** If you are interested in tabling on private property, like a mall or a special event, always get permission first.
- 3. Get the proper permit.** To table in a most public parks, college campuses, farmer's market or other events, a permit or registration is often required. Make sure you know the rules and have the proper permits if required.
- 4. Partner up.** It is always a good idea to recruit other advocates to help. You'll have more fun, get more signatures, speak to more people and feel even more engaged!
- 5. Order materials in advance.** If you are ordering materials, magazines or other Compassion & Choices-branded swag (tote bags, pens, clips or T-shirts), request from staff member and allow at least two weeks for delivery.
- 6. Be creative and have fun!** More people will be interested in approaching a table that looks fun and friendly. Use nicely organized materials, flowers, candy etc. to draw people in.
- 7. Table without a Table!** Find a suitable place to gather petition signatures with just a clipboard, pen and materials in a small backpack. Work with other advocates on a specific corner, entry/exit or suitable busy place at a public event. Wear your yellow Compassion & Choices T-shirt or branded stickers to identify yourself.

Guidelines for Tabling at Health Fairs, Conferences and Events

- 1. Plan in advance.** Some health fairs, events and annual conferences sell out early. Inquire about booth opportunities six months or more in advance to ensure that you can reserve a booth. If there is a fee associated with having a booth that you are not willing to cover, contact Compassion & Choices staff to discuss our ability to help.
- 2. Recruit other advocates.** Staffing a booth at an event can be fun and rewarding, especially when you have someone working side by side with you. Be sure to invite other advocates to help with set up and tear down and staffing your booth.
- 3. Order materials in advance.** If you are ordering materials, magazines or other Compassion & Choices-branded swag (tote bags, pens, clips or T-shirts), request from staff member and allow at least two weeks for delivery.

Once you've thought through the preparations and process, you can focus on fine-tuning your outreach approach. It's important to actively engage people. Don't think about tabling as setting up materials and sitting down to wait for people to approach you. Stand, smile and greet people as they walk by. Make eye contact and invite them to pause and learn more about your petition. Wear your yellow T-shirt and/or our stickers to provide a visual clue as to who you're representing

You may be nervous about speaking to strangers, and that's normal — just remember you're having conversations about an issue you care about. After two or three conversations, it will become easier and more natural. You can also role-play with a friend or fellow advocate or a Compassion & Choices staff member in advance.

Speaking with strangers will also be easier if you create a clear message for your visitors and a short question to draw people in. For example, "*Hi, will you please sign our petition?*" This is simple, and it results in people asking "*What is it for?*" rather than just saying no. This provides an opportunity to answer and engage the person with greater detail.

TIP: In addition to festivals, fairs and fun public events, consider other annual and national celebrations to attend and gather signatures.

Canvassing: Taking the Show on the Road

Canvassing is a more direct approach than tabling because it involves going house to house (or business to business) and asking people for their support. Many people appreciate the face-to-face interaction of canvassing, while others may not be as accommodating. Use your best judgment and follow these tips for a safe, successful canvass:

- 1. Be prepared.** Have a clipboard with your petition and pen ready, along with some basic materials on Compassion & Choices. Bring a great attitude. Use your discretion regarding a raincoat, sunscreen, hat, water, snacks etc.
- 2. Create a Script.** Plan and practice what you will say when someone opens the door and gives you the opportunity to talk to them. Your script will depend on what you are petitioning for and the local context of C&C's work. Remember: it's fine to have a script or notes on your clipboard.
- 3. Ring, then knock.** When canvassing, if there's a doorbell, ring it and listen for the sound of the bell. If there isn't a doorbell or you don't hear it ringing, don't be afraid to knock, and then knock again. If there is no answer, move on. Use your best judgement to make sure you were heard, but not bothersome.

- 4. Do the wave.** Once you see someone approaching the door, be sure to wave and smile so that they know you are friendly and want to talk with them.
- 5. Make it personal and just be curious.** Introduce yourself, smile and make eye contact while you're speaking to anyone. Recite your script and go from there.
- 6. Don't debate.** If the person you're speaking to is very busy or is strongly opposed, it's best to simply move on. In canvassing it's most important to find the people who support our issues or are still undecided, so don't spend time debating. Just thank them for their time, smile and move on.
- 7. Teamwork works!** Canvassing can be intimidating, even for people who have done it before, so recruit like-minded individuals to join you in pairs or small groups.
- 8. End positively.** Always end the conversation on a positive note and tell the person to have a nice day/evening. Thank them for their time, even if they didn't agree or sign your petition.

TIP: Safety First!

- Stay in your comfort zone; canvass in areas that you know; stop when it starts getting dark
- Canvass in pairs or small groups.
- Don't knock on a door if there are loud pets or other obstacles present.
- Never go inside a house, even if invited.
- Don't debate with people.

Help us Track Your Activity and Log Your Petitions

Visit the Volunteer Resource Center on the Compassion & Choices website and log your activity on [our online tool](#) to help us track all the ways volunteers across the country are making a difference.

Thank you

Once again, we're so grateful that you've chosen Compassion & Choices as a place to invest your time, energy and talent as a volunteer. Volunteers Make Change Happen!

Resources

General Petition

To print a general petition for your table or canvassing effort, [download a general petition here](#) and customize the petition language on the top to match your local or state campaign.

Tabling Checklist

- ❑ **Select a date and time for your tabling.** Be realistic about how long you can table. We suggest a minimum of two hours and a maximum of six to eight, depending on the event, location and how many volunteers will take shifts.
- ❑ **Set goals.** Based on where you are tabling and how long you'll be there, set goals for signatures gathered, conversations had and/or materials distributed — and keep track of your progress!
- ❑ **Select a location.** Public parks, popular pedestrian areas and college campuses as well as private spaces like malls have great potential. Events like a street fair, farmers market, community festivals or other public gathering are also good options.
- ❑ **Obtain necessary permission/permits.** Wherever you decide to table, look into any posted guidelines for setting up a display, or contact the management of the facility or event to get permission to table when required.
- ❑ **Recruit at least one tabling partner to join you.** If you are going to table for longer than three hours, you should consider changing shifts and recruiting two more advocates so you can each work one two-hour shift.
- ❑ **Secure a table.** A card table or fold-up six-foot table is a very standard size, easily transportable and works well for tabling. Bring a tablecloth of appropriate size.
- ❑ **Assemble a supply box.** Include clipboards for petitions, pens, a small first-aid kit and materials from C&C (magazine, literature or state-specific brochures, etc.). You should have adequate supplies for the number of folks you want to attract based on the goals you've set. Include bottled water and snacks for your volunteers.
- ❑ **Get the latest talking points.** Make sure to have the most recent messaging and updates from C&C. Reach out to your C&C staff contact for guidance.
- ❑ **Create a visually appealing table.** Use C&C-branded materials and your own creativity to bring attention to your table. Use a colorful flowers, candy or other items to invite people to approach.
- ❑ **Make it count.** Ensure that all the people who signed your petition get logged into our records. Send your petitions to C&C Processing Center: PO Box 485, Etna, NH 03750-0485.

