



Virtual Meetings Toolkit

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Preface

Dear advocates,

The people of the United States support Medical Aid in Dying -- in multiple national surveys and across age, race, and political breakdowns. Yet just one out of every five has the right to choose how their story ends, and can access medical aid in dying.

It's up to us to change that.

As one of the 10 US jurisdictions that has authorized medical aid in dying, your state has helped to lead the way -- but our work is far from done. Hurdles within the laws within these jurisdictions often block too many from getting the care they need. Sometimes it's a lack of eligible physicians able to prescribe the medication. Others, it's that a long waiting period that will outlast the lives of those suffering most, with little time left. Too often, racial and economic disparities become evident as we study who has been able to obtain a medical aid in dying prescription.

And the COVID-19 crisis has only driven these points home. Cancer and terminal illnesses have not gone away during the pandemic, which only exacerbated the suffering of people with terminal illnesses and put them at an elevated risk as they face the prospect of dying alone in hospitals across the country.

It has also brought back to the surface a systemic issue that permeates America's healthcare structure, and that we must address as we move medical aid in dying forward in your state: Communities of color are too often neglected, and deprived of the care and information they need. This is true in end-of-life care as well, and we must ensure we do everything necessary to put an end to end-of-life care disparities.

But we need your help. The following pages will give you all the information you need to confidently meet with your legislators and demand they improve access to medical aid in dying, and defend the practice from any attacks -- and if you run into any questions along the way, [don't hesitate to reach out to us using this form](#).

Thank you so much for all you do,

Charmaine Manansala

Our priorities

We need to improve care, expand options, and empower *everyone* to chart their own end-of-life journey. To make that vision a reality in your state, these are the points you need to highlight with your legislators:

- All residents of our state deserve the option to make their own end-of-life decisions when in the final stages of a terminal illness.
This is a decision that should be left up to them, their families, and their doctors. We should always provide quality end-of-life care for people who are suffering from an irreversible and incurable terminal illness, but when a person has only months, weeks, or even days to live and is suffering from untreatable, unbearable pain, we should allow them to end their suffering.
- Nearly 3 out of 4 U.S. residents (74%) support medical aid in dying.
And that support is growing. This figure comes from a May 2020 Gallup poll, up from 68% the previous year.
- This overwhelming support spans demographics.
Majority support included every demographic group measured in the survey, across gender, race, age, education and political affiliation breakdowns.
- The majority of doctors support medical aid in dying -- and support is on the rise.
According to a November 2020 Medscape poll, when asked "should physician assisted dying be made legal for terminally ill patients?" 55 percent of the 5,000 doctors surveyed nationwide said "yes," compared to 28 percent who said "no," and 17% who said "it depends." The poll concluded: "Acceptance of this concept has grown over the decade. More specialists (57%) than primary care physicians (51%) are in favor of physician-assisted dying being legal."
- The COVID-19 crisis has only made this issue more urgent.
If residents of our state living with a terminal illness contract COVID-19, they are more likely than others to die alone in a hospital, isolated from their loved ones. They deserve the right to choose how their chapter ends -- particularly now.
- There has not been a single incidence of abuse or coercion in nearly 50 years of combined data.
10 jurisdictions representing 1 in 5 American residents have authorized medical aid in dying. Together, they have 50 years of experience implementing their laws without

issue.

- This is about peace of mind.

Not everyone who obtains the prescription has to take it. But in states where medical aid in dying is authorized, people report significant relief from worry about future pain just from knowing the option is there if they need it.

Meeting request template

Below is a sample email to send to your elected official's office. Be sure to update the items in brackets with specific information.

You can also use our scheduling request tool, which will generate a personalized request from you based on your responses to a few simple questions.

Subject: Request for meeting

Dear [scheduler name]:

My name is [your name] and I am a constituent of [legislator's title and name] from [city].

As a supporter of Compassion & Choices, I am extremely concerned about end of life care in [State]. [If you'd like, provide a couple of sentences about why this issue is important to *you*, on a personal level.]

I am writing to request a virtual meeting with the [representative/senator] as soon as [his/her] schedule allows. If at all possible, [date] would be the best time for me and the [provide a number] other constituents who would like to attend the meeting. I can provide a Zoom link or conference call line for the meeting; please let me know what technology your office prefers.

This is a time-sensitive conversation, as the COVID-19 crisis has brought the issue of end-of-life care to the forefront. If terminally ill [residents of State] are infected, they are more likely to die a painful death, alone in a hospital, unable to say meaningful goodbyes to family and loved ones.

While the people of [State] legally have the option of obtaining a medical aid in dying prescription, too often unnecessary obstacles prevent them from obtaining this option -- and peace of mind. No one should suffer unnecessary pain at the end of life. We need to expand access to medical aid in dying, and protect the law from any attacks.

I look forward to speaking with [legislator title and name] about this crucial issue. Please feel free to contact me at [phone number and email] should you have any questions.

Looking forward to this virtual visit,

[Your name]

[Email address]

[Phone number]

Virtual meeting tips

- Before the Meeting
 - Scheduling:
 - You'll want to request your meeting about 1-2 weeks in advance.
 - Use our simple scheduling tool to reach out to your legislator's office if you need help tracking down their contact information.
 - Be sure to tell the office what you want to discuss, how many people will be at the meeting and if they are constituents, and when you would be available to meet.
 - After you send your first request, if you don't hear back, be sure to follow up and make sure your request was received.
 - If you still don't hear back, call your local office to request a meeting. Explain who you are, that you're a constituent who would like to meet with the legislator, and what you'd like to discuss.
 - You may end up meeting with a staffer instead of your legislator. That's ok! Your legislator leans on their staff as they make decisions, and sometimes staffers will have more time to hear all of your concerns.
 - Confirm what virtual platform is best for the office.
 - Once you schedule your visit, [fill out this form](#) to let us know when your meeting will be happening.
 - 24 hours before the meeting, be sure to follow up and confirm. Include the meeting log-in info again, your phone number, and cc everyone planning to attend the meeting. Be sure to attach our [Facts About Medical Aid in Dying](#).
 - Planning for the meeting:

- If you are going to be attending the meeting with a group, be sure to designate roles. These can include:
 - *Leader*: Serves as the main point of contact with the office.
 - *Issue Anchor*: Highlights our priorities and shares a personal story, emphasizing the ask. (There can be a few of these per meeting)
 - *Scribe*: Keeps a record of questions asked, commitments made, and keeps notes.
 - *Attendee*: Without the constraints of meeting room size, you can invite additional folks! Just make sure to keep speaking roles to a minimum in order to hit all of your main points while respecting the legislator's time.
 - Outline a rough agenda, and assign agenda items to each person.
 - Review [our priorities](#), outlined above.
 - Draft and practice your story! A personal story is far more convincing than any facts and figures. Your legislator will remember it better, and it will be more emotionally compelling. Check out our [storyteller tips](#) to make sure you're prepared.
 - Make sure the facilitator knows to give cues for when each person should speak -- and that all participants are familiar with those cues.
 - Do some research on your legislator. We'll provide basic details, but a quick Google search and click over to the "news" tab can provide valuable insight into your legislator's top priorities and concerns.
 - Practice and test the technology! Find a time when your group can meet before the meeting, and do a quick run-through to make sure everyone's ready and familiar with the tech.
- During the Meeting
 - Eliminate distractions
 - Dress in your Compassion & Choices t-shirt, if you have one. If you don't, just dress professionally -- and wearing our yellow or blue colors doesn't hurt!
 - Avoid background clutter, if possible, or practice using a black or professional background image on Zoom (see our [Zoom tips and tricks](#) for more info).
 - And try to avoid background noise. If you can't avoid being in a busy area, just be sure to put on headphones and keep yourself muted when you're not speaking.
 - Be punctual -- log in to your virtual meeting 10 minutes before the start time to ensure you're not stuck with any last-minute technical hold ups.
 - What to say

- Open with introductions. Make sure to mention that you are a constituent and if possible give a very concise explanation of your connection to the issue.
 - Be sure to stick to your agenda and the roles you previously laid out. When switching speakers, pause to give the next person time to unmute.
 - Listen actively, and ask questions.
 - If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, that's ok! You're there to explain why this matters to *you*, not to be the issue expert. That's where we come in. Simply follow up with "That's a great question -- I don't have the answer here now, but we'll make a note of it and will be sure to follow up with you after we consult the experts at Compassion & Choices." It's better to get them the right answer later than the wrong one now -- and it gives you an excuse to follow up and keep the conversation going later on!
 - Take detailed notes -- you'll need them when you report back to us.
 - Not all legislators are familiar with medical aid in dying, and some may have even fallen prey to dangerous misconceptions. Use this as your chance to educate them! Go over the materials you sent in your confirmation email.
 - But remember: Facts and figures will be forgotten, while your personal story and attachment to this cause is what will remain in their memories. Share why medical aid in dying matters to *you*, what drew you to this cause and why you're engaged today. Remember to use our [storytelling tips](#).
 - Be sure to connect the message to the legislator's interests. You can check out our tips on [creating Legislator Profiles](#) to learn more about how to do this.
 - And be sure to end with a clear, concise ask: *Will you support medical aid in dying?* Remember to write down their response to report back to us.
 - ***Most importantly: Be polite!*** Elected officials deal with a great deal of frustration and anger. As much as you may disagree with some of your legislator's viewpoints, it's important to maintain a respectful conversation and not let things get too heated.
- Closing out
 - Be sure to confirm who you should send any follow up messaging to.
 - Ask your legislator if you can take a snapshot of the screen -- or a picture with your phone -- to share later.
 - And remember to thank your legislator or any staff in attendance for their time and consideration.

- After the meeting
 - You're not done! No meeting should ever be your last conversation with a legislator or their staff. You want to be building a relationship that you can continue to lean on throughout the session -- and others in the future.
 - If you're on social media, post about the meeting, @ mentioning your legislator and thanking them for their time. This will give them some public recognition and make them think favorably of you -- but more importantly, it will remind them of the promise they made to you during the meeting. Check out our [social media tips](#) for more details.
 - Complete your [Virtual Meeting Report Form](#) to let us know what happened. This is a crucially important step -- it lets us know *exactly* what next steps we need to take to build on your great work and ensure the legislator stays true to their promise.
 - And don't forget your thank you note! Send a follow up email to everyone you met with, and use this as an opportunity to check in on the status of the request you made during the meeting.

Storytelling tips and tricks

Human beings do not make decisions rationally -- as much as we'd like to think we do.

Facts and figures don't drive someone to action. We're driven by *emotion*. Storytelling is hardwired into us. We'll forget statistics. But we'll never forget the way someone made us feel.

That's what makes storytelling one of the most powerful tools for advocacy. Lobbyists can give elected officials the polling data -- but *you* have the power to make it feel real. Make sure to tell your story of what brought you to advocacy with Compassion & Choices during your meeting.

Here are some tips on how to build a powerful advocacy story:

- Begin with the end in mind. Think through the final point you want to make, and be sure to hit it early and often.
- Start with a hook. Make your beginning intriguing -- you want to draw your audience in from the jump.
- Stay authentic. This is *your* story and *your* truth. Be sure to reflect that, and stick to the truth.
- Yet stay relatable. Think through who your legislator is, and what's going to be most interesting about your story *to them*.

- Draw a picture. Use descriptive words so that your audience can really imagine the story unfolding in front of them -- give details to the sights, sounds, smells, names, and places.
- Keep it short and sweet. Legislators' time is precious. They're often double or even triple booked, so you want to make sure to get to the point quickly. And if there are others in the meeting, you want to make sure they have time to share their story, too.
- Be the underdog -- and let your legislator be your hero. This meeting is happening because we need your legislator's help. And your legislator is in office because, at their core, they want to help people. Let them play that role, and close with a *call to action* that they can take to come to the rescue.
- Practice and prepare. Know what you want to say, and what major bullets you want to hit. Run through it on your own, so that in the meeting you can be in the moment as you share, not reading from a paper.

Legislator profiles

Before you walk into your meeting, you want to know at least a little bit about your legislator's history, priorities, and expertise.

[Ballotpedia](#) is an excellent place to start. It's a site that compiles information on legislatures, including brief bios, committee assignments, tenure information, and more.

Try to outline the following details -- identify areas where you can find common ground with the legislator, or key points that will align with their interests and priorities:

- Legislator name:
 - Career:
 - Education:
 - Family:
 - Spouse:
 - Spouse's Career:
 - Spouse's Education:
 - Children:
 - Military experience:
 - Committee Assignments:
 - Tenure:
 - Other notable information:

You may also want to do a quick [Google News](#) search to see if any recent headlines mention your legislator, as well as a perusal of their social media to see what topics they post about frequently.

Social toolkit

In addition to sending your legislator and their staff a thank you email following your meeting, be sure to thank your legislator on social media.

A public conversation about the meeting will hold your legislator or their staff accountable to their promises. It'll let them know you're willing to speak loudly and publicly about the issue. And you *know* they'll see it, since it'll set off their notifications.

There are still some stage legislators that aren't on social media. If you can't find them, try hashtagging their name (as in #FirstLast) instead of tagging them. That'll make it easy for their staff to track your post -- just be sure to mention that you posted about it when you send your thank you email.

Here are some sample tweets or Facebook posts to put up after your meeting:

- .@[Legislator's Handle], thank you for listening to your constituents who are demanding the right to chart their own end-of-life journey. We look forward to working with you to expand access to #medicalaidindying for the people of our state.
- Just met with @[Legislator's Handle]'s office virtually. It's great to see that the legislature isn't letting the pandemic stand in the way of connecting with us. Had a great conversation about improving access to #medicalaidindying ASAP!
- It's time for us to #endthesuffering in our state. I met with @[Legislator's Handle]'s office on Zoom to say: 2021 is the year we must increase access to #medicalaidindying. RT if you agree!
- When even one person who should be eligible to take a #medicalaidindying prescription is denied, it's too many. Don't let the people of our state suffer. @[Legislator's Handle] it's time to act!

Zoom tips and tricks

There's no denying it: Meeting virtually takes some of the magic out of the moment.

Whether it's a barking dog or a bad camera angle, there may be mishaps that disrupt your meeting. And that's ok! We're human, these things happen, and I think between our virtual happy hours and holidays, we're all a bit used to them by now. Give yourself some leeway, and give the same to your legislator and their staffers.

But there are some ways to make your call go as smoothly as possible. Here are our tips and tricks:

- **Maintain eye contact.** This can be more complex on Zoom, where a laptop's unfortunate angle can sometimes give a better look up your nose than into your eyes. Elevate your computer or tablet so that the camera is at eye-level. And when you speak, look directly at the camera instead of at the video of yourself or your audience.
- **Eliminate clutter.** Our lives are messy these days -- and so are our homes. Less time spent outside means more mess, and that's ok! But try to declutter what will be visible in your background. If you can't, you can change your Zoom background photo by going to Settings > Virtual Background and uploading any image you want. Just make sure it's a professional one. Our tip? Use a photo of your own town or a special place in your district to forge a connection with your lawmaker.
- **Cut down on background noise.** Time to yourself is hard to find, and we get that. Wear headphones and mute yourself when you're not speaking to make sure inadvertent background noise doesn't distract from the meeting. Want to interject quickly? You can press and hold the spacebar to quickly mute and unmute your microphone, right from your keyboard.
- **Turn on your Gallery View.** Seeing all participants will make it easier to know when to speak or not, based on others' body language. Gallery view lets you see everyone in the meeting all at once, instead of just the person speaking. To turn that on, click the tab that says "Gallery view" in the top right corner.
- **Make sure it's clear who you are.** If the name that's appearing for you in your Zoom call isn't accurate, or isn't how you'd like to be called, don't worry. You can update it at any time. From inside the Zoom room, click on "Participants" and then hover your mouse over your own name. A "More >" button will appear. Once you click on that, you'll be able to select "Rename" and enter the name you would like to appear.

And if you run into any other issues, you can peruse [Zoom's Help Center](#) for more info.