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**Locals debate wisdom of new physician-assisted suicide law**

Oct. 06--Gov. Jerry Brown's signing of a bill legalizing physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients ended speculation about the proposal's chances of success, but debate over the controversial legislation continues.

Locally, Marylee Shrider, executive director of Right to Life of Kern County, said she thinks this is a day Californians will come to regret.

"To say that we're disappointed that Gov. Brown has signed this into law is an understatement," Shrider said. "We're just sick about it."

Shrider said the bill contains few protections for the terminally ill who are depressed or infirm and unable to advocate for themselves. There is "considerable room" for abuse, she said.

She said she's read stories that have come out of Oregon -- one of four other states where physician-assisted suicide is legal -- where doctors believed terminally ill patients were being coerced into asking for assistance in dying.

Assemblywoman Shannon Grove, R-Bakersfield, has previously spoken out against the bill, saying in a news release earlier this year, "Health care providers should be focused on easing our suffering and saving our lives, not offering us a quick way to end it."

But Seven Bates, founding member of Atheist Society of Kern, said there have been a number of people on both sides of the political spectrum who have embraced physician-assisted suicide as a compassionate act.

He has personally witnessed a loved one suffer from a terminal disease.

"Until you've actually witnessed a loved one who is literally excreting their organs and suffering the type of pain that you know is only going to get worse, you don't understand the necessity of this," he said of the legislation.

Bates said California's law is drafted in such a way that it protects against potential abuse.

The law states the terminally ill must inform their physician, multiple times on different dates and both orally and in writing, that they want assistance in dying. The request needs to be signed and dated in the presence of two adult witnesses, and the physician must determine whether the person has the

capacity to make an informed decision.

"The position that I carry is physicians have a responsibility to do no harm, and to end suffering is to help patients not harm themselves," Bates said.

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