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The Maine House of Representatives and Senate have passed a measure that would legalize assisted suicide in the state and the bill reached the desk of Democratic Gov. Janet Mills June 4.

Mills has 10 days to act on the Maine Death With Dignity Act, as the bill is titled. She has not indicated if she will sign it into law or veto it. If she takes no action, it will become law automatically.

The state's Democratic-controlled House OK'd the bill June 3 with a 73 to 72 vote; the Senate, which also has a Democratic majority, approved it June 4 by 19 to 16.

News reports said that Maine lawmakers have been trying to pass this kind of law "for years."

The language of the bill, also known as L.D. 1313, states that terminating one's life under the proposed law "is not suicide." It allows a terminally ill patient who is a Maine resident and who is at least 18 to request "aid-in-dying medication."

Modeled closely after Oregon's Death With Dignity Act, which took effect in 1997, the bill also requires that a patient make two verbal requests to his or her doctor, at least 15 days apart, and give a written request to the doctor using a specific form the law mandates, which must be signed in front of "two qualified adult witnesses."

The prescribing doctor and one other doctor must confirm the patient's diagnosis and prognosis; the prescribing doctor also must determine that the patient is capable of making medical decisions.

Before the Senate vote, Republican Sen. Marianne Moore, a supporter of the bill, urged her fellow lawmakers to "come down on the side of the terminally ill, people who don't seem to be asking for too much: the right to choose their own end-of-life care.

But Republican Sen. Scott Cyrway was among critics of the proposed law who argued doctors can make mistakes about a diagnosis, noting many of his relatives have lived years longer than expected after being told they had just months to live.

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"There's several instances like that where hope is everything," he said. "If we go and take this hope away, that's what we're doing when we push this button."

In past statements when physician-assisted suicide proposals were taken up before in the Legislature, Bishop Robert Deeley of Portland has said that "suicide should always be seen as a tragedy."

"Allowing doctors to prescribe deadly prescriptions to hasten a person's death would be a horrendous wound to the dignity of the human person," he said. "The unintended consequences would include the elderly feeling undue pressure to view this as an option to prevent being a burden to others, a desensitization of the value of human life, as well as teaching young adults that people can be disposable."

"All people should have palliative and hospice care available to them when it is needed so that everyone can truly die 'with dignity' ," he said.

In a 2011 statement titled "To Live Each Day with Dignity," the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote: "To live in a manner worthy of our human dignity, and to spend our final days on this earth in peace and comfort, surrounded by loved ones — that is the hope of each of us. In particular, Christian hope sees these final days as a time to prepare for our eternal destiny.'"

If the measure becomes law, Maine will be the seventh state to allow physician-assisted suicide by statute. As of Jan. 1, 2019, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon,

Vermont, and Washington have death with dignity statutes, as does the District of Columbia. In Montana, physician-assisted suicide has been legal since 2009 under a state Supreme Court ruling.