

**Opposition to House Bill 1135 – The Colorado Death with Dignity Act**  
**John W. Volk, MD**

As I am unable to attend the Colorado House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee hearing of House Bill 1135, I am asking that my opposition to the bill be read into the record.

As with all proposed legislation, the sponsors of the Colorado Death with Dignity Act are intending to do a good thing. The bill's goal to provide a legal means to avoid suffering in the dying and ease the burden of families with loved ones suffering from a terminal illness is well intentioned and comes from a place of compassion. However, also like much legislation, the bill would have unintended and harmful effects.

I have practiced medicine in Colorado for nearly thirty years. My career has been spent serving the most vulnerable citizens of Weld County – the elderly and the poor. I have witnessed families struggle with the stress of caring for elderly, infirmed and disabled loved ones. I have known families torn apart by infighting over even meager inheritances and estates. With doctor-prescribed suicide as an available option, do you fear the potential for subtle emotional manipulation and pressure on vulnerable elders and infirmed family members?

I have also struggled to provide care for patients denied insurance benefits by an increasingly burdened and cost-conscious health care system. There is a growing strategy of identifying and case-managing the highest utilizers of health care dollars, particularly in the Medicaid system which funds health care for the poor. Doctor-prescribed suicide is a very inexpensive option for someone facing a terminal illness. Oregon has seen the case of a woman's insurance company denying treatment for her recurrent cancer but offering to pay for assisted suicide as an alternative. With the availability of doctor-prescribed suicide, do you fear that insurance companies or government run health programs might deny coverage for more expensive treatments in favor of a less expensive alternative – particularly for the poor?

It has been my great privilege to serve the most vulnerable of Weld County these past thirty years. I would be remiss as a physician if I did not speak up now on their behalf against the threat of this well-intentioned but dangerous legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

John W. Volk, MD