

# The Legalization of Physician-Assisted Suicide in all of the United States

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## Thesis

Physician-assisted suicide, if justified, should be legal in all 50 states of the United States because the patient has the right to their own autonomy.

## Background on PAS

- Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) allows a physician to provide a patient with pertinent information and a prescription for necessary lethal drugs so that the patient can willingly and successfully terminate their own life (Clinical Psychiatry News, 2017).
- In PAS, the physician is merely a helper but does not actually administer the lethal drug to the patient, contrasting it from euthanasia which is sometimes used interchangeably with PAS.
- PAS is currently legal in 7 states of the United States: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington
  - The process is very strict and only patients who meet certain guidelines, like having the correct mental headspace and having a prognosis of living for less than 6 months are allowed the procedure.

## Arguments for the Legalization of PAS

- A patient's autonomy should always be respected in terms of letting them have the right to choose the fate of their own body (Lois Snyder Sulmasy, 2017)
- Not every patient will choose the quantity of life over the quality of life in this case, and that is where physician-assisted suicide would play a good role.
- Preventing extreme suicides
  - A patient who was suffering from excruciating pain was not given the option of PAS even though he had little time left to live so he ended up shooting himself (Medical Economics, 1997).
- Going against the Hippocratic Oath
  - The Hippocratic Oath is taken by physicians to uphold certain specific ethical standards, and contains the phrases "first, do no harm" and "help the sick".
    - The physician can not feel how the patient is feeling physically so they end up creating more harm than good by prolonging their life unnecessarily.
- The physician has their own autonomy to choose whether or not to complete an assisted suicide.
- The government should not have any right to dictate if PAS should be legal because they have no connection to the patients so they don't understand the situation.

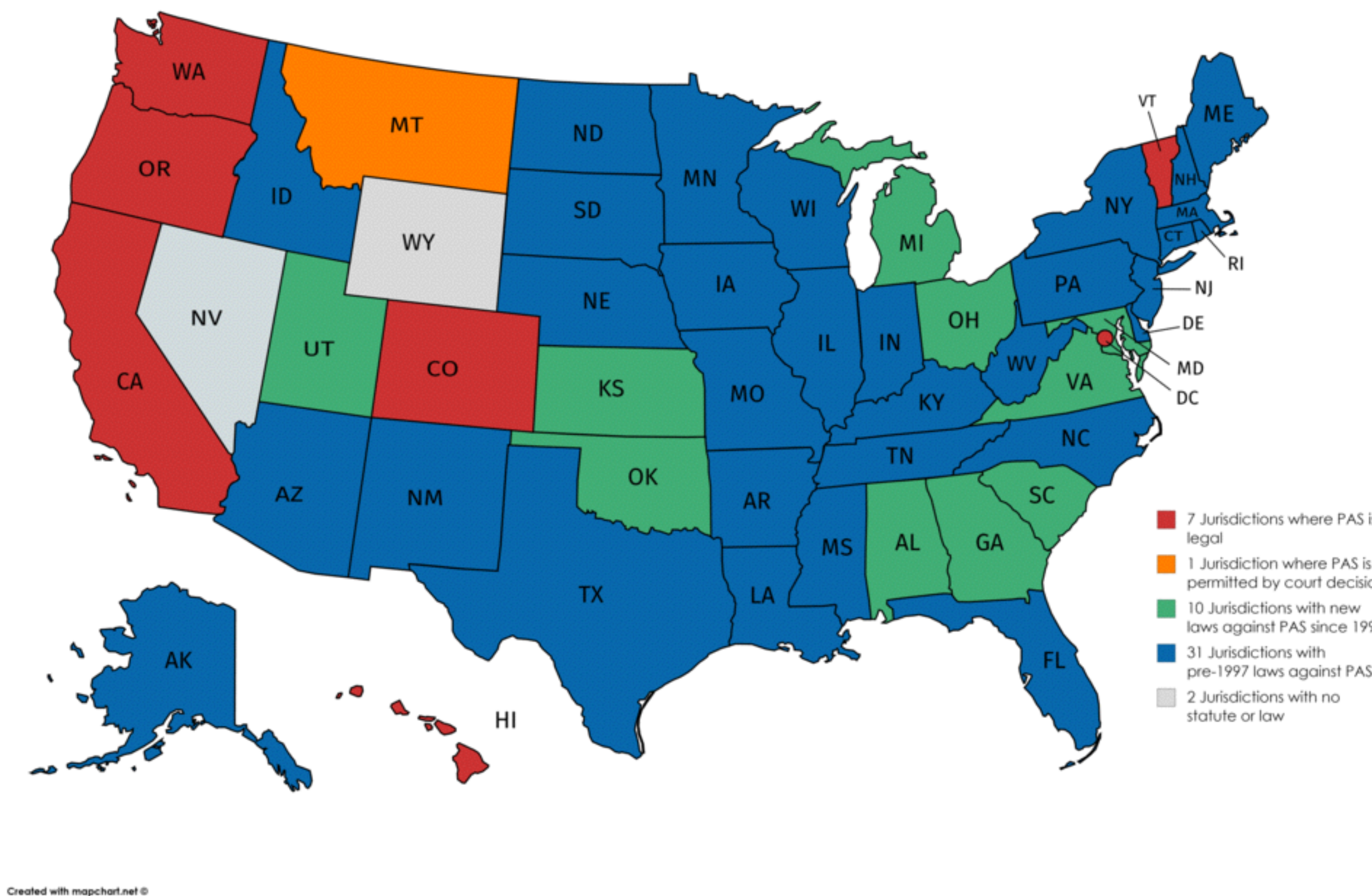


Figure 1: The United States and Each State's Jurisdiction of Physician-Assisted Suicide

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## Arguments against the Legalization of PAS

- The American Medical Association (AMA) disagrees with allowing physician-assisted suicide and claims that "physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control and would pose serious societal risks" (John Frank, 2016).
  - The AMA believes PAS will create "more harm than good".
  - According to the American Medical Association, in the Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 5.7, a physician should "respect patient autonomy".
- In the Hippocratic Oath, it states "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect".
  - The Oath is 2,400 years old and is rarely ever taken nowadays and if it is, it is a more modernized version of it, so quoting lines of this nature is invalid as they are only specific to its time period.
- The AMA also claims that patient autonomy should not be the sole factor in a decision because the patient is not always right about when to receive a PAS.
  - If a patient asks for a PAS to be done because they have a minor disability then this can not be justified and the physician has the right to deny the procedure.

## Conclusion

If justified, physician-assisted suicide should become legal in all 50 states of the U.S because the patient has the right to their own autonomy. patient's autonomy should be respected when it comes to the decision of choosing to live or die due to a terminal illness that affects them negatively. If a physician deprives the patient of this, they are taking away their autonomy as well as not completing their role as a physician. The government should aid these patients and allow the option of having a physician-assisted suicide if their means are justified.

## Acknowledgements

Faculty Mentor: Ronald Claypool