

## Instructions for Funeral Directors and Funeral Services Providers: Compliance with the Death with Dignity Act

The Death with Dignity Act of 2016 (“Act”), (D.C. Law 21-182; D.C. Official Code § 7-661.01 *et seq.*) states that “...the patient’s death certificate...shall identify the qualified patient’s underlying medical condition consistent with the International Classification of Diseases without reference to the fact that the qualified patient ingested a covered medication.”

According to the Act, “Actions taken in accordance with this act do not constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing, or homicide. If you know the decedent used the Act, you must comply with the strict requirements of the law when filing the death record:

1. The underlying terminal disease must be listed as the cause of death.
2. The manner of death must be marked as “Natural.”
3. The cause of death section may not contain any language that indicates that the Act was used, such as:
  - a. Suicide
  - b. Assisted suicide
  - c. PAS (Physician-assisted suicide)
  - d. DWD (Death with Dignity)
  - e. Mercy killing
  - f. Homicide
  - g. Euthanasia
  - h. MAID (medical assistance in dying OR medically assisted dying)
  - i. Legally Prescribed/Legal Prescription
  - j. Physician-assisted dying
  - k. Any reference to medications covered by this legislation
  - l. Also any reference to the Act, applicable as of June 6, 2017.
4. If the cause-of-death section contains any of the terms above (or any other language that may indicate use of the Act), **DO NOT SUBMIT** the certificate to the DC Department of Health Vital Records Division. Email the Vital Records Division at [vital.helpdesk@dc.gov](mailto:vital.helpdesk@dc.gov) for guidance on how to proceed.
5. The terms Secobarbital, Seconal, Pentobarbital, and Nembutal may indicate use of the Act. If the cause-of-death section lists any of these terms, email the Vital Records Division at [vital.helpdesk@dc.gov](mailto:vital.helpdesk@dc.gov) for guidance on how to proceed.

If the Department of Health concludes that the death record contains any language that violates the Act, you will be required to obtain a correction from the medical certifier before a burial-transit permit will be issued by the State Registrar or disposition approval by the Chief Medical Examiner.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Under District law, the Registrar of the Department of Health Vital Records Division has the authority to develop and distribute forms or other means of transmitting data to carry out its purposes. The Registrar also has authority to require information needed to complete a vital record, including death records.

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