

Peer makes new bid to change law on assisted dying

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Terminally ill patients with less than a year to live would be able to seek the help of friends or family to die without leaving them open to prosecution, under the terms of a new Bill.

Helping someone to die is punishable now by up to 14 years in prison. The new Bill would decriminalise assisted suicide in certain circumstances, meaning that relatives could legally help with travel to the [Dignitas clinic](#) in Switzerland or with an overdose at home.

The Private Member's Bill will be tabled this summer in the House of Lords. If it succeeds, a mirror Bill will be introduced in the Commons.

It will state that assisted suicide should be legal when a patient is certified as terminally ill and expected to live less than a year. It will also require that a person's wish to die is confirmed by two doctors. The Bill will also make clear that patients must take their own life.

Lord Falconer of Thoroton, a former Lord Chancellor, who will table the Bill, said that the public had lost confidence in the present law. Opinion polls show that about three quarters of the public want assisted dying to be made legal.

"The fact is that the law has ended up in the wrong place," Lord Falconer told *The Times*. "In a situation where someone is terminally ill, with just months or even weeks to live, and their pain and suffering is only going to increase, why are we saying they cannot be helped to take their own life, if that is what they want?"

He believes that there has been a change in the public mood since the last major attempt to change the law was defeated in the House of Lords in 2006. "There are also 200 new peers since then and those of us who want change are better prepared for the debate, having held a commission on the subject," he said.

The Lords is still the best place to start the debate, he believes, as the main political parties have made it clear that they will not give a lead on the issue.

Since 2006, the Director of Public Prosecutions has issued new guidelines on assisted suicide, which suggest that prosecution should proceed only if the motives of the helper involved are suspect.

But Lord Falconer said that this did not provide enough reassurance for families. Although none of the relatives of the 100 or so Britons who have travelled to Dignitas to die has been prosecuted, all have been investigated by police.

Peter Saunders, campaign director of the Care Not Killing group, which opposes legalised assisted suicide, said that a new attempt to change the law had been expected but he believed that the Lords would reject it.