



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONT
Melissa
(916) 319

Governor signs Wolk bill to put patients in charge of end-of-life care decisions

Legislation gives Californians new tool to express wishes for medical care

SACRAMENTO—Today, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law legislation by Assemblywoman Lois Wolk (D-Davis) providing seriously ill patients with a life expectancy of a year or less with a new tool to communicate precise instructions for their end-of-life health care.

Wolk's Assembly Bill 3000 ensures that when a patient has a completed Physicians Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form, the form must be honored by all health care providers. A POLST addresses a range of treatment options and enables a patient to clearly express their treatment preferences regarding life-sustaining treatments such as resuscitation, nutrition, and pain management.

"I applaud the Governor for signing this legislation, which puts patients in charge of their end-of-life care decisions," said Wolk. "My legislation ensures that, unlike advance health care directives and do not resuscitate orders, POLST forms will carry the weight of a doctor's order meaning that it must be followed across all health care settings, including long-term care facilities, and emergency rooms, by all health care providers including physicians, nurses and emergency medical personnel. That's the primary reason the POLST process is the best way for patients to ensure their wishes are honored."

A POLST form is filled out by a health care provider during a conversation between the provider and patient and must be signed by a doctor in order to be implemented. Evidence shows that POLST forms are easily used in emergency situations as they are written in precise, unambiguous language, and printed on bright color that makes them easy for emergency care providers to identify.

AB 3000 does not require that a physician utilize the POLST form. It does provide patients the option of using the POLST process, which has been successfully implemented in 15 other states and is currently being tested in seven pilot programs throughout California, including one in Woodland.

"I know from personal experience how critical it is for a patient's treatment preferences to be clearly conveyed and easily accessible to health care providers. A person's decisions relating to their end-of-life care are among the most important they'll ever make. This new law will ensure that those decisions are honored by all health care providers," said Wolk. "I look forward to continuing to work with the healthcare community to see the POLST process utilized to benefit patients throughout California."

AB 3000 is broadly supported by more than 40 organizations such as the American College of Emerger Physicians, Alliance of Catholic Health Care California, California Academy of Family Physicians, California Hospital Association, Palliative Care Association, California Association of Health Facilities California Assisted Living Association.

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CAPITOL OFFICE: P.O. Box 942849 • Sacramento, CA 94249-0008 • Phone: (916) 319-2008 • Fax: (916) 319-2108
DISTRICT OFFICE: 555 Mason Street, Suite 275 • Vacaville, CA 95688 • Phone: (707) 455-8025 • Fax: (707) 455-041
E-MAIL: assemblymember.wolk@asm.ca.gov **WEB SITE:** <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a08>
ASSEMBLY WEB SITE: www.assembly.ca.gov

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