

Kentucky Court Says Families Can End Patients Lives Via Euthanasia

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Frankfort, KY (LifeNews.com) -- The Kentucky Supreme Court is under fire for a decision announced Friday saying that families of patients who are "permanently unconscious" may end their lives by removing them from life support. The decision is allowed even if the person hasn't declared their desire to have their life ended through a living will or other advanced directive. The ruling upholds a 1994 law allowing the euthanasia decisions. However, pro-life groups are condemning the decision.

Robert Cetrulo, an attorney who is the president of Northern Kentucky Right to Life, told the Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper, "It's a dangerous step down this road toward a culture of death."

"The court has ruled that a guardian can kill a ward who is unconscious," Cetrulo told the paper.

Edward White, an attorney with the Thomas More Legal Center, a pro-life law firm, told the Lexington Herald Leader newspaper that the case put "Kentucky on the slippery slope of euthanasia."

"This is a very unique case because the Commonwealth of Kentucky is faced with the decision of whether to terminate care of a person who is in the care of the state, and the decision is made that the person should be terminated," White explained.

The case revolved around a mentally disabled man who was a ward of the state and died in 1996 while the case was pending.

Matthew Woods became a ward of the court when he suffered a severe asthma attack that left him unconscious. He had no living relatives.

His appointed attorney, Bruce Simpson, argued the 1994 law did not apply to Woods and challenged the notion that the state of Kentucky had a right to end Woods' life.

Simpson told the Courier-Journal he may ask the Kentucky Supreme Court to reconsider its decision or he may appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

The court issued a 5-2 majority opinion in the case arguing that a "surrogate," such as a guardian or relative, may make health care decisions for a patient who is unable to do so and has not left a living will or other advance directive.

Life support may only be ended when a patient is in a so-called persistent vegetative state or when "inevitable death is expected by reasonable medical judgment within a few days."

The patient's life support may be ended without a court order unless there is a family disagreement.

Associate Justice Donald Wintersheimer, wrote a strongly worded dissent saying "the power of the state has been unleashed to kill its own citizens."

Justice Janet Stumbo also dissented but did not write an opinion.

<http://66.195.16.55/bio440.html>