

# Five Wishes

By Senator Johnny Ellis

Many of us don't want to plan how we will spend our last days. It's understandable. As unpleasant as it is, we owe it to ourselves and to our loved ones to make our end-of-life wishes known. That's why I co-sponsored a bill that puts the so-called "Five Wishes" into Alaska statute. My family and I have personal experience with these issues. My father passed away this past spring and though his financial affairs were sorted out, his health care directives were not, which forced me to make some very difficult decisions. I wish he had left me with a *Five Wishes* document. It would have been easier for everyone involved.

The *Five Wishes* is a legal document expressing your end-of-life desires to caregivers. It comes into play when you can't speak for yourself. The directive addresses these important issues:

- Which person will make health care decisions for me, when I can't make them?
- What kind of medical treatment do I want, and what kind do I want to avoid.?
- How comfortable do I want to be?
- How do I want people to treat me?
- What do I want my loved ones to know?

As the baby-boomer population ages, there are heartbreaking stories about people who are kept alive by artificial means because no one knew what the patient wanted. A completed *Five Wishes* document is the best way to make your desires known and carried out so your last days are lived in dignity.

*Five Wishes* helps family members when you are sick and can't speak for yourself. It lets them know if you want to spend your last days at home, or in a hospital. How long you want to be kept alive artificially. *Five Wishes* lets doctors know how much pain medicine to prescribe. You can also state whether you want to be an organ donor.

The document is not new to the U.S., but it is new to Alaska. Thirty-seven states already use the *Five Wishes*. Doctors and health care providers say everyone benefits by knowing your desires in advance. The American Association of Retired People endorses *Five Wishes*. For more information, you can talk to your health care provider. Or visit [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org). Talking about death and dying is never easy. But *Five Wishes* alleviates some of the anxiety associated with end of life issues.

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