

## Tribune editorial: Bill paves way for option in hospice care

Feb 24, 2021

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**S**ome bills in the Legislature are no-brainers. While they may be considered housekeeping bills, they serve an important purpose.

Such is the case with **Senate Bill 2226**, which has passed the Senate and awaits House action.

The bill would allow the establishment of residential end-of-life facilities and give the North Dakota Department of Health the responsibility of licensing and oversight of the facilities. The bill would open the door to another form of hospice services not available in North Dakota but offered in other states.

The Tribune editorial board supports the legislation for a number of reasons. It would provide another option for people to die with dignity in a home setting, it could offer longer care and would be funded by donations.

The driving force behind the bill is the Rockstad Foundation, whose founding family owned Dan's Supermarket Inc. The foundation proposes building a facility to be called Gaia Home, which would be a complex of 12 residential homes connected to a main building. Each home would have living quarters along with laundry and garage. Each home would be approximately 1,400 to 1,800 square feet.

The homes would be staffed by nurses and volunteers for 24-hour assistance. Hospice care would be from licensed hospice providers selected by the families.

Hospice care is normally provided at a patient's home, but that's not always practical. A patient may have children at home and not want the children to have memories of a death in the home. The patient may live in an apartment that would not accommodate

relatives during the period of hospice care.

The Rockstad Foundation plans a fundraising effort with the goal of \$35 million, though the project could be launched after a portion is raised. The foundation plans to create an endowment for ongoing funding. Organizers have proposed a location in northeast Bismarck with 4-6 acres for the home. The goal is for groundbreaking in the spring of 2024 and for operations to begin in June 2025.

Most who use the Gaia Home are expected to be 65 years old or older. At present, that age group makes up 16% of the state's population and is estimated to grow by 11% in the next 10 to 15 years. The average length of stay in similar homes in other states has been 11 days.

It's an ambitious plan by the Rockstad Foundation and if successful would provide a valuable option to the community. Most people dread the thought of dying in a lonely setting. One of the horrors of the pandemic has been the inability of loved ones to be present in the last moments of life.

Hospice care provides an opportunity for people to pass in a home setting with those they love the most. The Gaia Home would be another valuable hospice option.

The House should approve Senate Bill 2226.

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## **Letter: Support new option for end-of-life care**

Mar 1, 2021

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**I** am writing in support of Senate Bill 2226, which will create and enact a new chapter of North Dakota Century Code to establish a licensure for residential end-of-life facilities through the North Dakota Department of Health.

My lifelong passion has been real estate. I find deep pleasure in developing new communities in which homes are at the core. Home has a way of holding many life experiences and allowing for many memories to be made by those who live there. And now I'm speaking out on the need for "homes" for the people of North Dakota who need end-of-life care.

Throughout my life I have had several experiences with friends and family receiving hospice care. To me, the beauty of hospice care is that it can be offered in a person's life-long home, in which they are continually surrounded by their family and friends. Unfortunately, it's not always possible for the terminally ill to receive care in their own homes.

Currently there is no other residential home option for people in the state where a family can live with their loved one as they receive 24-hour end-of-life care. Therefore, I urge you to reach out to your local representatives to support passing the amended version of SB 2226, to create a new option that will allow a homier choice for people, in which they can make final lasting memories with their loved ones.

**Chad Wachter, Bismarck**

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## **Letter: Help loved ones have care options**

Mar 1, 2021

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**I** am writing in support of Senate Bill 2226, which will authorize a new option for North Dakota families facing end-of-life dilemmas. My own father is someone who could have benefited from a residential end-of-life facility had such a facility been available when he was facing the sunset season of his life.

When he became quite infirm just before he died, the only solution for him was a hospital bed in the living room because he couldn't make it up the stairs and all the bedrooms were on the second floor. The limited space in his small home also made it difficult for his children to stay with him to help with caregiving duties. How wonderful it would have been to have a residential homelike facility where he could have gone! It would have lifted the burden off his wife and made it easier for his children to visit and say their goodbyes.

Many individuals in this same situation are elderly and their needs are beyond what their spouses or family members can provide. Senate Bill 2226 would create a new statute in the Century Code to allow residential facilities to exist in North Dakota. These facilities provide a peaceful home experience to those facing the end of their life.

Many states already have places like this for loved ones to peacefully die with dignity and in comfort. This is a concept that is much needed here. My father and family members would have benefited greatly from the existence of a residential end-of-life facility. Let's make sure our loved ones have this additional option for end-of-life care in the future by passing SB 2226.

**SuAnn Olson, Baldwin**

## Letter: Support bill for new end-of-life care option

Feb 22, 2021

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**A** residential end-of-life facility has been my dream since 2014, as the founder of the Rockstad Foundation. I have had many friends who have experienced hospice care. For some, it was a blessing to provide hospice in their loved-one's home. For others, the stress and anxiety of becoming a loved one's primary caregiver was overwhelming.

I also know many people who struggle from the guilt of not being able to honor their loved one's wish of being in a home during end of life, and the loved one passes alone in an institutional setting. This has been especially evident during COVID-19.

I support Senate Bill 2226, which would add a new option for North Dakota's hospice patients by changing Century Code to allow the Health Department to create a new licensure for residential end-of-life facilities.

If SB 2226 passes, the Rockstad Foundation proposes to create a separate non-profit entity and to build a 100% privately funded and licensed residential end-of-life facility. Our dream is to build a development of twin homes in Bismarck where individuals receive hospice services from a licensed hospice provider of their choosing. Family could live with their loved one while facility staff of RNs, LPNs, and CNAs provide 24-hour supportive care, relieving families of difficult caretaking tasks.

The Rockstad Foundation wants to support hospice programs by supplementing available end-of-life options with a residential facility. North Dakota's 65+ population use hospice services the most. According to **CensusReporter.org**, this group currently makes up 16% of the state's population and that number could increase by

11% in the next 10-15 years. There is currently no true home setting in North Dakota where 24-hour supportive care is provided for those who seek hospice services and are unable to receive care in their home. There could be with SB 2226.

**Terry Rockstad, Bismarck**

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