

EVERYBODY'S COLUMN

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Approve legislation on health care proxy

The Family Health Care Decision Act was first introduced in the State Legislature in 1994 and still awaits passage. It has been reintroduced this session in the Senate. While New York has failed to protect its citizens, 47 other states have enacted similar laws to deal with this complex issue. It would enable family members to act as a surrogate and to decide about treatment for incapacitated loved ones who have not signed a health care proxy.

More than 75,000 people die annually in New York health care institutions, and only 20 percent of them have a health care proxy. Most people are also unaware that current law prohibits parents of chil-

dren over the age of 18 from making health care decisions for their son or daughter if they become incapacitated.

The Family Health Care Decision Act provides legal authority for a decision-making system that effectively balances empowerment of a surrogate and adequate protections for an incapacitated patient. It specifically establishes procedures for honoring patient wishes, while at the same time involving family and loved ones in decision-making.

Please encourage your state representatives to support this important piece of legislation when it is considered again this year so all citizens are protected. Most importantly, complete a health care proxy and ensure that all members of your family over age 18 have one.

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