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Thompson: Right to Try law could help save lives

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Long before I ever walked the halls of the Michigan Capitol, I walked the halls of hospitals. I spent years as a nurse caring for people who were fighting for their lives. I've seen firsthand how the line between hope and heartbreak can be painfully thin when someone you love is sick. You don't forget the sound of quiet rooms, the eyes that search yours for an answer you can't give, or the families holding on to the possibility of just one more day with a loved one.

As a healthcare worker, that's what I wanted most to give: hope, a sense that recovery was still possible against all odds. Yet for too many patients, especially those facing some of the world's most deadly illnesses, the greatest obstacle isn't their illness, but the regulatory system standing in their way.

Too often, the government doesn't just slow progress. Instead, it decides who gets the chance to keep fighting and who doesn't. For those facing rare or terminal illnesses, time is not a luxury — it is the measure of everything. Yet Washington continues to demand that patients wait as the machinery of bureaucracy runs its course: reviews, approvals, recommendations and delay.

This isn't how medicine is supposed to work. That's why I'm fighting in the Michigan Legislature for the Right to Try for Individualized Treatments. This legislation would allow patients to access experimental therapies that are still in Phase 1 trials and not yet approved by the FDA — treatments that could potentially extend or even save their lives. Years of testing and procedural review might make sense for mass-market drugs, but for someone with only months to live, the calendar becomes the cruelest barrier of all. Every layer of red tape means another promising therapy sits on a shelf while families stay in crisis. Every delay isn't measured in months or data points; it's measured in lives lost.

The Right to Try for Individualized Treatments restores a balance between safety and letting the most vulnerable do everything they can. It allows patients to pursue cutting-edge treatments designed for their genetic profile, even if federal regulators haven't given their final approval. The measure would impose no new cost on state taxpayers. There is no requirement for insurance plans or government programs, such as Medicare or Medicaid, to cover these treatments. Patients may be charged for the direct costs of treatment, but manufacturers are barred from turning a profit.

More than a dozen states have already enacted versions of this reform. It's time for Michigan to join the movement to empower the most vulnerable among us to fight for their lives. The Right to Try for Individualized Treatments ensures that patients can work directly with qualified physicians and ethical manufacturers to access cutting-edge treatments that could extend or save their lives. It gives doctors more flexibility to innovate and restores the moral foundation of medicine: the partnership between healer and patient.

The Right to Try for Individualized Treatments isn't about politics; it's about compassion, dignity and the basic human right to keep fighting when hope remains. By supporting this legislation, my colleagues in Lansing can return agency to patients who have run out of options and shift the balance of power from distant regulators to the people whose lives are on the line.

No Michigan family should have to leave the state or run out of time to save someone they love. Let's make sure they never have to.

Rep. Jamie Thompson, R-Brownstown, represents Michigan's 28th House District.