



Connecticut
Coalition of
Secular
Organizations

**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
HB 6645: AN ACT CONCERNING COMPASSIONATE AID IN DYING FOR TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS**

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
MARCH 20, 2013

This statement is being submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition of Secular Organizations, an organization of over 1000 members, in support of HB 6645: An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients.

Our coalition is in favor of this legislation for two reasons. First, it provides mentally competent, terminally ill patients the right to control how they face death at the final stages of their illness, increasing their autonomy and alleviating their fears about end of life suffering. Second, the requirements outlined in the bill prevent abuse and ensure that a decision to request end of life medication will be the patient's decision alone.

I'd like to share Nancy Niedzielski's experience with the committee, which is reported in the documentary film by Peter Richardson, "How to Die in Oregon." Nancy's husband, Randy, suffered from a terminal case of brain and spinal cancer. During the final stage of Randy's cancer, the tumors in his brain grew so large that his eyes were forced outward, preventing him from physically being able to close his eyelids. Randy frequently screamed out from the pain and described his suffering as "worse than death." Before he died, Randy asked Nancy to promise him that she would fight to enact end of life legislation in Washington.

It is with the torment of those like Randy in mind that it becomes crystal clear that end of life legislation can bring autonomy, dignity, and peace of mind to terminally ill patients. Surely, it is not for everyone, but that is precisely the point of the law; to provide patients with as many compassionate options as possible and the authority to make their own decisions.

Opponents of end of life proposals frequently argue that this type of legislation is a "slippery slope" that will inevitably lead to abuse of the elderly, disabled, and mentally incompetent. However, 15 years of data collected as a result of the Oregon law has proven that those fears, although sincere, were prevented by the thoughtful and meticulous protections contained in the law. The Oregon act

mandates rigorous reporting requirements, and according the Oregon Public Health Division, the agency charged with collecting data and reporting on the law, there have been no cases of abuse. Independent studies of the law corroborate this finding. Further, by making this choice legal, we are protecting those who would seek it out on their own from abuse. The Connecticut bill mirrors the protections and requirements of the Oregon law and will provide Connecticut residents with the same freedom of choice and protections from abuse.

In conclusion, our Coalition would like to emphasize that there is no argument against this bill that is supported by the available facts and evidence. Those opposing this bill are in reality seeking to impose their own views about end of life decisions on everyone else; some are even cloaking their arguments in fears of abuse. But the evidence is clear; end of life laws have not led to abuse. Instead, end of life laws have done exactly what they purported to do: they have provided choice to the terminally ill in how they face death.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the members of the Public Health Committee to vote in favor of HB 6645.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement to the Committee.