

127 Anderson Road
Kent CT 06757
March 19, 2013

Public Health Committee
Hearing on assisted suicide for terminally ill patients
phc.testimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear Legislators,

I am sorry I can not attend the hearing in person, as this is an issue of great importance. I was diagnosed with cancer in 1991, and can remember the fear of dying a prolonged and horrible death. I had never felt more helpless in my life. I have read of people saying dismissively that the fact that where doctor assisted suicide is legal, few people who acquire the drugs use them, that this option really just "provides some reassurance". Well, that variety of fear is nothing to dismiss, I can tell you, and people have a right to that sort of "reassurance".

A close friend of mine nursed another friend through the final stages of lung cancer. The dying friend begged her to "help her" out of this life. With terrible anguish, my friend refused, because she had a dependent and could not risk going to jail. And please note, the woman with lung cancer had hospice care, and had all the pain killers she wanted.

I was sole care giver for my father, who died of prostate cancer 3 months ago. I was so afraid that he would make a similar request of me, and have a terrible need for release from his situation. I thought frequently of a case in Cornwall, CT, where a man was sent to trail for providing a gun for someone with advanced prostate cancer. I didn't know what I would do if my father asked for help.

People who are opposed to a suicide option for the terminally ill are fond of saying that "With today's pain killers no one will suffer at the end of life". That simply is not true. There are many forms of suffering, that pain killers do not address. There is profound breathlessness, either from the blood not being able to carry oxygen, or the heart or lungs not working. With this is the same low grade panic that you and I have felt when we have not been able to get air, for instance when were under water. People whose nervous systems are failing may choke frequently, and live in terror of choking to death. There is the global feeling of being poisoned, when the kidneys have failed, and the blood is filling with poisons that the kidneys can't evacuate. There are people with advanced breast cancer or prostate cancer, which has metastasized to the bones. For them, simply shifting their position in bed can cause a broken bone, and it hurts just as much as if you or I broke our bone. There are many ways for the body to make life a misery, and pain killers don't help. When someone is very debilitated, their response to any drug changes, and the drugs themselves can make the patient feel awful.

People should have a right to choose just how much, and of what, they will go through, when there is no hope of ever resuming their life. To deny them that choice is simply barbaric. Anyone who believes otherwise should hang around in sick rooms more, and they should pray they never get a first-hand education in the need for that choice.

Sincerely,
Mary Ferris
127 Anderson Road
Kent, CT 06757