

HB 6645

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Irene Silberstein, 220 William Street, Portland, CT and I am an advocate for House Bill 6645, “An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for the terminally Ill.”

Many of us fear dying—more than death. We think of the last stages of life and worry about our loss of independence and dignity; we are worried about the possibility of severe, intractable pain that cannot be relieved. We know that death is the bookend to birth, but we fear a journey that will be unbearable.

In the states that have passed a compassionate care act, it is notable that very few patients actually appeal for assistance in dying. Many people are comforted by family caregivers, by their faith and by hospice and can deal with end of life issues. But for some people, there is no respite, no relief. Think of being imprisoned in your body with ALS, Lou Gehrig’s disease, for example.

Fortunately, the application of this bill will be limited by many safeguards and that is as it should be. The law will protect those people who are not terminally ill and those who are mentally incapacitated. And because this is a voluntary act on the part of the suffering patient, an individual whose religious persuasion forbids assistance in dying will not be affected.

If I am in the position of hopeless suffering with an incurable disease, I don’t want to aim a gun at my head and pull the trigger; I don’t want to start my car’s engine in a closed garage and sit there until I turn blue and pass out; I don’t want to put a bag over my head and gasp for breath because I know it would be too uncomfortable and I’d rip the bag off; I don’t want to overdose on pills (what kind? how many?) and discover I am still alive but need my stomach pumped. This would be miserable for me and a terrible burden for my loved ones.

No, those are terrible choices. I want compassionate care.

Truly, many physicians want to help those patients whose suffering is unbearable. Bill 6645 presents an opportunity for caregivers to blend science with mercy and technology with compassion. Bill 6645 recognizes that for some people, there is a profound need to hasten the process of dying in a humane, caring way.

I urge you to support this bill.