

Presentation to the Legislature March 20, 2013

Re: house bill 6645, an act concerning compassionate aid in dying for the terminally ill

Madam Chairs and Members of the Committee,

I am testifying in support of the above specified legislation.

On June 11, 2004, I went to the home of a good friend, John Welles, 66, in West Cornwall to sit with him from 9 am to 1 pm. John was dying of cancer and a roster of friends was looking after him in shifts. He had gone from hospital to rehab to home where he lived alone. John had been very frank and open with us. He had no intention of becoming dependent on others and losing control of his life. Instead he would end his life on his terms. When I arrived, there was John and a close friend who had been with him through the night. She was saying her goodbyes and would be at the local restaurant in West Cornwall. John informed me that "this was the morning." It looked like I had "drawn the short straw." We visited briefly, he smoked his pipe for the last time and we went to another room where he produced a rusty .38 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver. Being concerned that the gun could malfunction and maim him, I examined it, ran a cleaning rod through the barrel and handed it back to him. John loaded the gun and with the aid of his walker went out into the garden. He lay down and asked about where to aim the gun. We concluded what would be effective and shook hands. He asked that I leave him and I walked a short distance up the driveway. He asked where I was; I told him and started to say, "God bless you." The gun's report cut the last word short. I returned to John, observed that his suicide had been successful, and went into his house and called 911. In time a State Trooper arrived and eventually the Western District Major Crime Squad. At 4 pm after making a detailed and lengthy statement I returned home.

In January of the next year, 2005, I received a call from the State Police detective at Troop B in Canaan informing me that I was under arrest for second degree manslaughter. The next day I went to the State Police barracks, was processed and released. The judicial process began in Bantam and continued in due time in Superior Court in Litchfield. At each court appearance residents of Cornwall and area supporters overflowed the courtroom and anterooms. The outcome was not a trial but a one-year accelerated rehabilitation with nothing on my record.

John Welles was of sound mind and very capable of making his end-of-life decisions. He feared losing control of his life and of being reduced to a vegetative state. He should not have been forced to end his life by his own hand. Fortunately he was capable of doing that on his own unassisted. No one should have to face the end of life alone. We did what was called for under the circumstances. The eventual process was a relatively long, costly and painful one. It should not have been necessary.

Connecticut's laws can and should better serve the people.

Huntington Williams, Cornwall, Connecticut