

Testimony of Barbara Mancini
Connecticut General Assembly Joint Public Health Committee
March 17, 2014

Good morning. My name is Barbara Mancini. I am among the millions of baby boomers who either have helped provide home hospice care for their dying parents or will do it in the near future. Up until last July, I spent several decades as an emergency room nurse in Philadelphia, so I am very familiar with end-of-life medical issues.

Last month marked the end of a year-long nightmare in which I was arrested by the police in Pottsville, Pennsylvania and prosecuted by the Pennsylvania Attorney General on the felony charge of aiding the suicide of my terminally-ill 93 year-old father. I handed my father his legally-prescribed morphine at his request, and he consumed the contents of the partially-filled one ounce vial. He was in severe pain, and perhaps he meant to end his life. His legal end-of life directives not to be resuscitated and naming me as his health care proxy were summarily invalidated by the home hospice care provider and the police. He died four days later in a hospital, where he contracted pneumonia and was subjected to exactly the treatment he specified he never wanted.

I lost my nursing job, and incurred legal fees of over \$100,000. If convicted, I faced a maximum of 10 years in prison. Thankfully, a judge dismissed the charge, citing a lack of evidence and a prosecution based on hearsay, speculation, and conjecture. The state attorney general decided not to appeal that decision, but stated that unless the state law was amended, she "would continue to enforce the law as it currently exists."

Opponents of aid-in-dying legislation often invoke the slippery-slope argument - meaning it will lead to abuses of elderly and vulnerable people. I have been on the other side of that slippery slope. I am not exaggerating when I say it caused untold suffering and anguish to my father, me, my family, and the friends and co-workers who stood beside us and witnessed that suffering.

Reasonable and carefully crafted safeguards can prevent the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Legislation based on statistical outliers produced the situation I found myself in. The attorney general did not get her conviction; but I, and my family, were punished nevertheless.

If Pennsylvania had a death-with-dignity law when my father reached the end of his life, he would have had the option to utilize it, and my family and I could have avoided this horrific experience. That is why I will be working to pass death-with-dignity legislation introduced in Pennsylvania. In considering your legislation, please consider that the worst thing you can do is to do nothing.

Thank you for letting me testify today. I would be glad to answer a few questions if you have any.