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Written Testimony
Comptroller Kevin Lembo
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Concerning
HB 5326 AAC Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, Senator Welch, Representative Srinivasan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for *HB 5326 AAC Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients.*

I am here not only as State Comptroller, but also as a resident of Connecticut, son, grandson, father, spouse, former state Healthcare Advocate, and former director of an AIDS service organization in the 1980s. Like you, I have kept watch at the bedside of loved ones.

Death comes for us in many ways. While the end of our life may be similar to others with the same terminal diagnosis, the nuance of our death; the peace or rage we experience is as unique as we are as individuals.

I am here to support this legislation because I want this choice for me. Whether or not I exercise my choice would be decided among me, my family, and my physician.

Within the context of your discussion about this important topic with the people of Connecticut, and as a framework for your future deliberation, I hope that we can agree that no one party can impose their beliefs or decisions on another.

Careful construction of this law protects every individual from participation in the act. An individual with a terminal illness is under no pressure to choose to end their life. Physicians, likewise, are under no pressure to participate.

There are a number of protections in this legislation to ensure the safety and comfort of not only patients when faced with a grave diagnosis, but also their families and physicians. The safeguards include defining who are qualified patients, and the process

for obtaining aid in dying medication, as well as ensuring that a health care provider may voluntarily choose to participate.

To get a sense of how the legislation would perform here, one only needs to look to the experience in the state of Oregon, which has a population size slightly larger than Connecticut. Oregon enacted its Death with Dignity Act (DWDA) in 1997 and according to the Oregon Public Health Division, a total of 1050 people have had DWDA prescriptions written since that time. Of those people, 673 patients have died from ingesting medications prescribed since the law was passed over 15 years ago.

Who were these patients?

- 90.4% were enrolled in hospice
- 80.3% had terminal cancer
- 82% were concerned about their loss of dignity while dying
- Median age was 71

These patients were people who wanted their end of life to be the same as a life well lived. These patients had a choice.

I hope I do too.

Thank you for your consideration.