

Attached and in the body of this email please find my testimony in opposition to HB 5326.

Last year (on March 20, 2013) I submitted my testimony to the Public Health Committee against "An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients" (then numbered HB 6645). I refer you back to that testimony, because my objections have not changed and I would make the same points today.

My testimony, then as now, is based on my own personal experience with my mother as well as my study of history.

Pared down, my strong aversion to this bill comes from my belief that there is no way that a physician assisted suicide law could be made safe or acceptable.

1. There is too much potential for coercion such as the subtle (or not so subtle) pressure that I got from all sides even without such a law in place to stop my mother's medical treatment and "allow" her to die, with the help of a lot of morphine and a Do Not Intubate order. I learned from the experience that the system as a whole is increasingly geared toward dispatching those whose medical care is "too costly" (meaning the elderly or those with serious physical challenges requiring complicated and expensive care to sustain life.)
2. It is a fundamental conflict of interest for health care providers to be about the business of ending lives. It changes the nature of the doctor-patient contract in a fundamental, and terrifying, way. I don't want some day soon to be the poor, elderly sick person who has to wonder if her doctor or nurse thinks she would be better off dead and tries to convince her to just "die with dignity"! That is what it came down to for my mother. It breached the trust that she and I needed to have in her health care providers.

3. I mentioned being a student of history. I'm also a student of literature. The following passage comes straight out of George Orwell's novel 1984, in which the society he portrays has adopted "newspeak" as a means of changing language in order to call one thing its opposite in order to make it acceptable, even desirable:
"No report of a public agency ... may refer to the practice of obtaining and self-administering life-ending medication to end a qualified patient's life as 'suicide' or 'assisted suicide,' and shall refer to such practice as 'aid in dying.'"

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Actually, Orwell didn't write that one. It comes straight out of the bill you are considering and is iterated in most of the physician assisted suicide bills that are being introduced across the country.

I ask you, please, to seriously think through the implications of this bill. It is not compassionate. It is not wise. Please do not move it forward.

Sincerely yours,
Joan M. Cavanagh