

**Sen. Gerratana and Rep. Johnson, Public Health Committee Chairmen
Sen. Welch and Rep. Srinivasan, Ranking Members**

**Testimony re: House Bill 5326
An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients
March 17, 2014**

My family was fortunate enough to have an incredibly wonderful experience with hospice care for my terminally ill mother in 2009. When a right-to-die bill (proposing to legalize physician-assisted suicide) was introduced in the Connecticut legislature last year, I felt compelled, largely out of gratitude, to try to raise awareness of hospice as a compassionate end-of-life option that *already* exists. I spoke up via an op-ed that was published in the *Hartford Courant*. A legislator who read it asked me to testify at the public hearing last year, and I did. The assisted suicide bill, killed in committee last year, is back again this year, and once again I feel moved to chime in.

I do not understand the persistent prevalence of so much misinformation and so many misgivings about hospice care. But I do understand that people will and should follow their conscience when making life and death decisions. It is not my intention to stand in judgment of others when I speak up. I speak up because I fervently hope more people facing terminal illness will make informed decisions – decisions that take into account ALL the options. I welcome the renewed debate in the legislature as a new and important opportunity to take a stand FOR hospice care for terminally ill and dying patients.

Ultimately I hope more people will ask for hospice or welcome it when it is suggested, understanding that it is as focused on ensuring quality of life during the final months, weeks, and days as it is on ensuring death with dignity and without pain when the end finally comes. And when it's that time, hospice represents assisted dying, not assisted suicide.

When the end finally came for my mother (after three months in hospice care at home), my family's grief was balanced by unexpected gratitude that we had given Mom a good death. She was at peace, and so were we.

What do dying patients fear? Pain and suffering, yes; but they also fear being a burden to family, causing anguish to loved ones, losing control, losing dignity, dying itself. I know my mother was afraid of these things. And although she never said it out loud, I'm fairly certain there were moments when she wished it would all just end.

Hospice helped her continue to want to live. Hospice made it possible for her to enjoy living... And then hospice helped her be comfortable, physically and psychologically, dying.

The goals and benefits of palliative care and hospice care cannot remain a well-kept secret. How many more people will conclude that suicide, assisted or not, is their only option?

Arguably there is no more compelling example of compassionate care in our healthcare system today than hospice. In honor of my mother and out of gratitude to her hospice team, I will continue to advocate for hospice care, and I'm glad my memoir about Mom's joy-filled last year, *When All That's Left of Me Is Love*, is raising awareness of it.

This public hearing is another opportunity to raise awareness. I hope legislators will educate themselves about hospice and palliative care before they cast their votes on the assisted suicide bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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