

Monday March 17, 2014

Before the Public Health Committee

**Testimony opposing HB 5326:
An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients**

Honored members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Maria Messier, Hospice Director for Home and Community Health Services, Inc., a not-for-profit home care and hospice agency based in Enfield, Connecticut. I am a registered nurse with over 30 years experience in home care, hospice care, and skilled nursing facilities. I am also certified in Hospice and Palliative Care through the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

I am opposed to HB 5326: An Act concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally ill Patients, which has as its goal the legalization of physician assisted suicide.

HB 5326 does not provide what hospice can provide – cherishing life to its natural end in all its beauty and dignity, comfort to the patient and caregivers, and quality care by controlling symptoms until natural death occurs. In all my years of nursing practice, whether at home or at a skilled nursing facility, patients who initially stated they wanted to end their own lives no longer expressed that need once their physical symptoms or emotional needs were met with the compassion and skill that only hospice can offer.

The greatest concern that I have is this: while the bill is presented as a choice for determining how one can deal with their terminal illness as a right to die, it does not prevent in any way the obligation to die, no matter how it may be worded legally. Patients have the right to die pain free, anxiety free, in the setting of their choice, with whomever they love, and with all the supports that hospice teams provide. Assisted suicides do not allow for any of this.

I strongly urge that you reject the concept of physician assisted suicide – it is not compassionate to the person who is terminally ill or their loved ones. It only promotes hopelessness even after the patient's death- the hopelessness that was emphasized at the

time the patient decided to obtain the means to die because they have not been given the hope for a quality of life with a terminal prognosis. The family is left to forever hopelessly cope with knowing that their loved one committed suicide and wondering if anything more could have been done.

Hospice gives patients and families that assurance that all will be done and has been done to have quality of life despite a terminal prognosis.

Rather than having patients and families consider suicide, it makes perfect sense that patients and their families should be allowed to consider the Hospice experience. Hospice provides hope and quality of life in the journey of inevitable death – and this hope leaves a sense of peace and life that can continue as a loving testimony for the family and friends of those who continue the journey after the patient's death.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Maria T. Messier MSN, RN, CHPN
Hospice Director
Home and Community Health Services, Inc.