

Susan Y Okamoto
HB 5326

Dear Committee Members,

Following is my testimony in opposition to HB 5326.

The bill is named "Aid in Dying" but it is actually a bill to legalize Assisted Suicide in Connecticut. True aid in dying consists in medical (which includes palliative), emotional and spiritual support for someone who is dying. To allow physicians to prescribe, as a treatment, lethal drugs for the purpose of suicide, is to enshrine suicide as "health care," to open the way for it to be mandated in health insurance policies and pushed on patients as a preferable "treatment." Obviously, the cheap cost would make it attractive to public and private insurance providers.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of helping out someone who was dying of cancer. I was supplementing hospice care that was already in place. This lady was serene, and reported good effect from the morphine patches that the hospice nurse provided. The patient's health continued to decline, and, as her appetite for solid food was lost, she simply took liquids as tolerated: no one forced anything on her. She rallied a few days before her death: she got out of bed with assistance and sat outside with a group of her relatives for a few hours. She truly was enjoying herself in this last family reunion. It is not uncommon for dying patients to rally like this. Years ago, working as an RN in oncology I saw this same thing happen with patients who were close to dying. No one knows what positive experiences for patients and their loved ones will never happen when suicide cuts life short.

I also worked as a psychiatric nurse at the Institute of Living for 6 years. I cannot help but think that legalized assisted suicide, even if limited to those pronounced by physicians as having 6 months or less to live, will increase the number of suicide attempts among people, particular adolescents and young adults, suffering from depression.

No one can say for sure he will live another day, so each of us may well take the advice to make every day count. Faced with dying, most people are understandably afraid. Our caring psychological, medical and spiritual support will help alleviate their fears and pain, and help them make every day left in their natural lives count.

Respectfully Yours,
Susan Y Okamoto