

CT Public Hearing Testimony

3/07/2014

Speaker: **Thomas Meyer**

In support of: House Bill 5326

Dear Chairs and Members of the committee:

My name is Thomas Meyer, I am from Roxbury, CT and I am speaking in support of House Bill 5326, An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill.

Had this bill been law six years ago there is a good chance that not only would my sister and I have been able to be at my mother's side when she died but I would not be living with the stigma and hardship of being a convicted felon today. On an August afternoon in 2006 I received an unexpected call from the nursing home where my 97 year old mother, a long time member and part-time activist in the Hemlock Society, was trying to recover from a bad fall. When I entered her room the first words she said were, "I'm having difficulty breathing, I'm suffering and I want to go home, *RIGHT NOW*." Those words triggered memories of the many conversations our family had over the years concerning her death and what she perceived as her right to self-determination. She had made it clear that when she knew the end was near she did not want to be lying in bed, under heavy medication, waiting for organ failure. "What is the point?" she would say. "There is no quality of life in living like that." She worked hard to enact physician-aid-in-dying legislation in the 1990's. When the vote failed she was left with no recourse other than the how-to method of the day; that recommended in Derek Humphry's book "Final Exit".

So it's easy to understand why, when my mother uttered the word suffering, I knew the situation was very serious; I might very well be losing Mom today. Unbeknownst to me and according to the police affidavit, she had disclosed just that intention to a friend who visited the night before. She had also stopped taking her medications. The details of the following couple of hours are too involved for me to convey in this short period of time but suffice it to say I would subsequently face a choice. Either be faithful to my mother or obey the law. Actually, there was no decision. She was so helpless and weak there was no way I could leave her alone to fumble away and suffer through the night if she failed. Mom meant the world to me. Under her direction, I helped her; just as I always did every day when I visited at dinner. As hard as that was, this was her wish and I had to respect it. The following morning I contacted the authorities and provided a complete confession.

At the time and to this day, I know in my heart I did the right thing. We handled the act of dying, one of the most personal of family issues, as she saw best. In the final analysis, we didn't hurt anyone else. We didn't harm society. There was no public spectacle. She got to die peacefully in her own bed, on her own terms. After leading an incredibly long, joyous, fulfilling and productive life shouldn't she have this liberty? When you reach the point where you know you can go no further, who are others to say how you must die? This bill would go a long way to ensuring that others, with terminal conditions, have a choice in how and when their life ends.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

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