

Testimony Against HB 7015
An Act Concerning Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients
Judiciary Committee, March 18 2015

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This is the third year that I have spoken out to oppose this legislation. Its wording changes slightly each year, but nothing alters my original premise: there are no safeguards possible to make it acceptable. Rather than offering true health care, this legislation serves the agenda of medical cost-cutting, which translates to cessation or limitation of treatment for those who are poor, elderly and/or disabled (those who cost the system “too much”.)

I know that there are many who support this bill because they believe it to be both benign and compassionate. I implore you to understand that its results will be neither.

The well-funded Compassion and Choices organization (re-branded from the former Hemlock Society with a new name to appeal to progressives) tries to make it appear that the Catholic Church represents the only real counterpoint to this legislation. With due respect to those whose religious convictions motivate their opposition, this is a deliberate untruth on the part of Compassion and Choices, an attempt to make invisible the bill’s many opponents from the disability community and others like me, whose opposition comes from direct experience.

While I was always uncomfortable with the idea of “physician assisted suicide” and horrified by the antics of the ghoulish Dr. Jack Kevorkian, who violated his medical oath repeatedly and with impunity, I didn’t think too much more deeply about it until I encountered the attitudes of the health care system up close and had to fight for my mother’s life as an elderly patient who was costing Yale New Haven Hospital “too much money” because of a long hospitalization paid for by Medicare and Medicaid—a patient whose life was expendable. I ask you to read the details of this experience in a forum piece that was published in the New Haven Register on March 4, 2014: <http://www.nhregister.com/opinion/20140304/forum-aid-in-dying-bill-neither-compassionate-nor-wise>. I also spoke about it extensively in my written and oral testimony in 2013 and again in my written testimony in 2014. (I believe the testimony from both years should be posted on the CGA web site.)

The coercion and bullying I experienced from many of my mother’s health care providers to end her treatment made me distrust those providers deeply at a time when I (and my mother) most needed to believe that they had her interests at heart and would provide the best and most complete care possible in the situation. I saw other caregivers go through the same agony. And this occurred in a state where medical assistance for suicide is still, thankfully, illegal.

Dying is a process, as is life. Barring sudden, accidental death, we will all be in a situation of vulnerability one day, dependent on the care of others. This is part of the human condition. Do we handle it as a community, or do we force caregivers and their loved ones to face it alone? Do we make the sick feel guilty for being a “burden” or do we support their struggle to live as long

as possible, in as much comfort as possible, and to die with their hearts at peace when their (our) time comes?

In 2013 and 2014, I was privileged to be part of a team of caregivers who cared for a good friend who was dying of breast cancer at her home. Her pain was managed and she received medical treatment designed to slow the process down even while receiving palliative measures (this is the concept of “concurrent care.”) I can only wish that all the money that Compassion and Choices is spending on its nationwide quest to enable medical providers to kill their patients could instead be spent to provide such care for very ill patients and support for their caregivers. I suspect that this would go a long way toward reducing whatever limited demand there may be for medication to hasten the end of life.

The issues raised by this legislation cut deeply into the question of what kind of society we want to live in. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony. I implore you to reject the cynicism and contempt which is at the heart of this bill. Please, vote NO on HB 7015.