



**Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care**

**TESTIMONY**

**Delivered by Sister Catherine Mary Clarke, F.S.E., Licensed Social Worker  
Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care**

Before the Judiciary Committee  
March 18, 2015

**Testimony in opposition to HB 7015  
An Act Concerning Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Sister Catherine Mary Clarke. I am the Clinical Social Worker for Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care and have served in the health care ministry for 25 years. Our agency serves in 30 towns and in our various health care programs we have 180 employees and 15 Franciscan Sisters. I am here to oppose Bill No. 7015 because it gives terminally ill persons the wrong message. Life is precious. I have served people of all faiths and of no faith over these past years and what is true of all, as death draws near, the natural dying process provides *us* with a special opportunity to care, to be there for patients, family members and friends, and to help the dying person know they are important to us.

In Connecticut we have excellent hospice providers who daily provide compassionate care to those who are terminal. Palliative care has improved remarkably over the years. Clinical persons are here today addressing the advances in pain management that have developed through the years countering effectively the reason this bill does not offer a solution but creates more problems.

It is my experience that at the end of this dimension of life, the dying person longs for support as they find their peace, move beyond fears, reconcile with family and friends.

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We need to remember that there is a difference between pain and suffering. We received the story of a son and his mother. The son wrote, "What I have learned is that suffering can bring out the best in people. My mother's suffering brought about heroic love in those who cared for her . . . All she had was love . . . and that love transformed everyone around her." This story is repeated every day where there are devoted caregivers, loving family members, and dedicated hospice providers.

Instead of focusing on eliminating the pain and suffering, the arguments of those promoting Bill No. 7015 are focused on eliminating the patient, or the sufferer. There is an avoidance of the use of the word "suicide" in this bill, which is unfortunate, because that is what the bill encourages and endorses. To help another end their life unnaturally makes a statement about the willingness to live beside the dying person, to care for him, to actually co-suffer with him/her. To suffer is to love every person, not just those who are terminally ill. To love is to assume the burdens of the other.

When society affirms suicide, it plants seeds of support for suicide in young people and old people. This results in more pain and suffering as loved ones, parents and/or children, grieve the loss of those unexpected deaths.

There was a letter to the editor of Connecticut newspapers from a resident of Oregon that was given to us. Her name is Jeannette Hall. What she has written re-enforces our grave concerns about Bill No. 7015.

"In my state, assisted suicide is legal, and I was disturbed to read that Connecticut is considering a similar law. Assisted suicide has been legal here in Oregon since 1997. It was enacted by a ballot measure I voted for. In 2000, I was diagnosed with cancer and was told I had six months to a year to live. I knew the law had passed, but I didn't know exactly how to go about doing it. I tried to ask my doctor, but he didn't really answer me. In hindsight, he was stalling me, trying to get me to change my mind.

I did not want to suffer. I wanted to use our state law, and I wanted my doctor to help me. Instead, he encouraged me not to give up, and ultimately, I decided to fight. I received chemotherapy and radiation. It has been nearly 14 years, and I am so happy to be alive! Assisted suicide should NOT be legal. Oregon has made a terrible mistake.”

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and to hear my concerns. Again, I ask for the sake of the true dignity of human life and true compassionate care giving, you oppose Bill No. 7015. If you have any questions, please contact me at 203-238-1441.

Submitted by  
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