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Testimony in Support of HB 7015

An Act Concerning Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients

Judiciary Committee

March 18, 2015

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, Senator Doyle, Representative Fox and members of the General Law Committee.

Today, I testify in support of the legislation known as the Aid in Dying bill. I have testified in support over the years, for many years with a constituent, Bill Meyer, who was once a high profile advocate. Bill was arrested and indicted here in Connecticut for assisting the death of his father, who was suffering greatly from debilitating disease in a situation which we would generally describe as "end of life."

A judge eventually dismissed Bill's case, but the experience only emboldened Bill to advocate on behalf of others. Bill died last year, after a long battle with cancer which he fought to the very end. That was his choice. Now it's my turn to carry on his fight.

I've worked most of my career in healthcare, including a number of years at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. I've had the opportunity to learn a lot about palliative care, hospice and end of life choices. I think I have a good perspective on the remarkable advances we've made in helping people cope and maintain some quality of life while dealing with debilitating illness. But I'm also aware of its limitations, particularly when extreme, constant pain is involved.

I consider this bill as a testament to compassion and mercy, values I would hope would also be foremost for those with strong religious beliefs. It has been carefully written – and recently modified to include key aspects of the Oregon law – so as to narrow proscribe the circumstances and protocols under which this personal choice could even be contemplated. It is not an option for the mentally ill, those with serious disabilities or as a financial solution for the indigent or their families.

The proponents of this bill have listened to the medical community to include important safeguards and greatly respect the convictions of those opposed to suicide. The bill reflects this sensitivity and provides adequate protections. This is the year to enable the relatively small number of terminally ill individuals to exercise their free will to end life when quality of life is effectively gone.