

Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Peter Schwartz, and I live in West Hartford. I am here to ask that you please vote NO on HB 7015.

Legalizing assisted suicide -- which, even when cloaked in nice words like "aid in dying" this clearly is -- would be a tragic step in the wrong direction.

I first want to make clear that I am not questioning the good faith of the bill's supporters. I assume that they are motivated by compassion. Like most people, I found it heartbreaking to read about Brittany Maynard and the struggles faced by her and her family. But there is an old maxim in the law that says that "hard cases make bad law." And that has never been more true than with the law being considered today. Because it would be terribly unwise and extremely bad public policy to react to the suffering of Brittany Maynard and others by enacting a law like HB 7015 which, however well-intentioned, turns societal norms about life and death on their heads and brings suicide -- something we spend campaign after campaign trying to prevent -- into the mainstream.

It is undeniable that many terminally sick people experience pain and suffering. So do their families. I know this from personal experience as I watched my brother-in-law and a good friend -- both in their early forties -- die from the very same brain cancer that afflicted Brittany Maynard. I also lost both my mother and my father-in-law to lung cancer. Although those experiences were difficult, I witnessed up close how effective end-of-life care is in making the last days less of a trial. I can tell you that their deaths were not by any means a walk in the park, but their care WAS compassionate, and they DID die with dignity. I was amazed to see how effectively the hospice nurses were able to manage their pain. Taking the truly extraordinary step of allowing other people to be legally involved in ending the life of another human being, is simply not necessary given how effective hospice care can be.

I am also extremely concerned that this law will have a harmful effect on the sad phenomenon of suicide in general. Most of us have personal knowledge of a young person who, in the throes of a crisis, has taken their own life. By all accounts, this is a growing problem. But how are we to convince a young person that suicide should not be an option when, at the same time, we advertise assisted suicide as a lawful and "compassionate" means for ending suffering? The same goes for the epidemic of suicides among our veterans. How do we logically differentiate their very real suffering from the suffering of those with a terminal illness? We can't. The truth is that enacting a law like HB 7015 would present a hopelessly confused and mixed message about suicide: on the one hand we have the legislation recently introduced by Senator Blumenthal aimed at reducing suicides among our veterans, suicide prevention hotlines, and well-publicized controversies like the one surrounding Cassandra C, who the legal authorities in this State would not allow to refuse cancer treatments; and on the other hand we have a bill aimed at making suicide easier and, if that were not enough, directly involving physicians in the process. I would submit that the policies designed to **prevent** suicide are the right ones, and we should not contradict and dilute them with bills like HB 7015.

I would also like to share my perspective on this bill as someone who has been a lawyer for more than thirty years, and has spent a lot of time reading statutes. To be perfectly fair, I knew I would not like the bill before I started reading it. But as I read the actual language and provisions of the bill, I was shocked. "Orwellian" might be an over-used term, but if ever there was a bill that fit that description, this one is it. For example, section 9(b) of the bill requires the person signing the death certificate to list "the underlying terminal illness as the cause of death." But that's demonstrably false! Section 12(c) declares that a person's act of taking the prescribed medication dispensed under the law "shall not constitute suicide for any purposes." Wow. I would suggest to this committee that when you have a law that uses linguistic tricks like these, and goes to such lengths to create legal

fictions, that something is seriously amiss.

The legalization of assisted suicide is a Pandora's Box that should never be opened. If people are not satisfied with the practice or availability of hospice care, let's focus on improving it. If patients are not sufficiently educated about the need for preparing living wills and end-of-life health care instructions, then let's work on that too. But enacting a new law that completely revolutionizes traditional ideas about life, death, suicide and the role of physicians should only be considered when there is a clear and pressing need for such a drastic solution. Given the effectiveness of palliative care, that clear and pressing need simply does not exist.

But please do not let Connecticut take a step on this very slippery slope. Please vote NO on HB 7015.

Thank you for your consideration.

Peter Schwartz
1 Timber Lane
West Hartford, CT 06117