

Comments Concerning Proposed
Bill # 668

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: John Wieder, III, 502 Sky View Dr, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

I am writing in STRONG opposition to SB668 that would allow assisted suicide (please, let's stop trying to hide and get around the fact that that is exactly what this legislation is about). I write based on two very personal experiences – the battles of my wife and younger sister with terminal cancers.

First, I think we MUST recognize that medical science is NOT as precise as proponents of this legislation would suggest. Physician estimates of how long a patient may have to live, what their life may be like in that period of time etc. are just that ESTIMATES. As I will discuss below, we can NOT be sure nor can the doctors that they are making the “correct” call on these things. And we should not be allowing decisions to be made based on such uncertain and imprecise information.

Second, the proponents seem to ignore the fact that there are other options for terminally ill patients – and their families – that ease much of the discomfort, pain and anguish which proponents use to “tug at our heart-strings” on this issue. Hospice care for example.

Third, please remember that only a couple of years ago, a similar measure was placed before the voters in referendum in our neighboring state of Massachusetts – generally viewed as a very liberal, open, progressive, set of voters – and was DEFEATED fairly handily.

Let me give some details of the 2 instances I have lived through. Some years ago, my wife was diagnosed with a very rare form of breast-cancer. We were told from the start that her chances of survival were not good at all – perhaps 6 months IF all went well. Needless to say, with 2 daughters, one still in college and one recently graduated, this was devastating to my wife. Yes, she ultimately was unable to work. However, up until the last few weeks, she WAS able to get herself to chemo and radiation treatments, she WAS able to do some work around the house, she WAS able to continue some of her hobbies. Admittedly, some things at a reduced level. Perhaps most importantly, she WAS still able to act as a mother to our daughters, advise and counsel them and she WAS able to continue as a loving spouse to me. There was pain and days of discomfort and despair, but NEVER a desire to give up and NEVER a desire to take her own life - to end it all. And to make a long story short, she fought this disease AND survived for a little over a YEAR after diagnosis – TWICE as long as the doctors projected – and was hospitalized only for a couple of short stays during her battle and than in the last 7-10 days and that was because of a medical procedure to relieve some symptoms – a procedure which turned out to be more than her weakened condition could handle.

Secondly, about 6 years ago, my sister was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. We were told this was quite probably terminal especially as she was only in her 50's and for some reason people who develop that cancer at that age are the least likely to survive. When the doctor went in to do the first procedure that was "standard" treatment, he discovered things were worse than x-rays etc had shown and was not able to do the treatment. My sister valiantly went through the chemo & radiation treatments which we were told might enable the surgery to be tried again. The second attempt at surgery was also undoable.

Through all of this, my sister, who was retired, continued an active life, playing bridge at the Hartford Bridge Club virtually every day, lunching with friends, managing her investments and otherwise enjoying the life she had planned for retirement. Again, there was pain, there was weight loss, there were side-effects but she pushed on NEVER considering giving up, NEVER feeling a desire to take her own life and end it all, ALWAYS hoping and praying that new treatment might come about. Amazingly, 10 months after diagnosis and after the 2 attempts at surgery, and various chemo and radiation treatments, my sister was able to take my 2 daughters on a quick three day trip to Edinburgh Scotland to fulfill an item on her "bucket list". From initial projections of her doctors, she would not even have been ALIVE at that point let alone able to do such a trip!

And in the end, she died 16 – SIXTEEN – months after diagnosis after only about a week at home with hospice care. Substantially longer than most patients with this cancer – at least at the time – were projected to survive.

I can certainly empathize with people who are suffering through probably terminal illnesses and the effects of treatments for them. But as you can see from these two very personal examples, I just can NOT accept that there is a serious need for this legislation. It presumes TOO MUCH accuracy in the ability of medical science to predict outcomes. It seems to IGNORE the available options to deal with the issues – such as Hospice care. To my mind, it places the physicians in an untenable position given their oath to do no harm to patients. It seems to strongly buy in to the "me first" or "entitlement" mentality that is increasingly prevalent in our society – ie give ME what I want HOW I want it WHEN I want it. And it diminishes the will to live which can be an important component of successful treatment.

Lastly, for years we have been hearing increasing concerns about the costs of medical care. This was one of the main drivers behind passage of the national Affordable Care Act which, so far at least, seems to have had little success in addressing the cost issue. I greatly fear that passage of this legislation would have a serious UNINTENDED consequence. Do we really want to ADD to the anguish of patients and their families with "pressure" from doctors, facilities, insurance companies, Medicare and/or Medicaid administrators to "do the COST EFFECTIVE" thing and take the assisted suicide option? I can think of nothing more UNFAIR to patients and their families yet if we pass this legislation, that *possibility* is almost certain to become a *reality*.

Again, I can certainly relate from 2 personal experiences, to the anguish and suffering of terminally ill patients. HOWEVER, I CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT THIS IS NOT THE ONLY OR BEST "SOLUTION". Please, consider carefully the Pandora's box passage of this legislation will open and DEFEAT this measure.

