

Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ray Bennett and I am speaking in opposition to HB 7015. My daughter and I come to the Capitol frequently as part of a prayer network to pray for the legislators and the various issues facing our state. A few weeks ago we sat in on a Judiciary Committee meeting, and while you were in recess we went next door to the Public Health Committee public hearing, which incidentally, they have dealt with and defeated similar bills to this one in two previous sessions. A bill before them proposed increasing training for public health professionals in youth suicide prevention. While waiting for the hearing to begin, I met a woman who had come to testify in favor of the bill because her 16-year-old son committed suicide three years ago. Her anguish and grief were vivid and moving, and she wept as she shared her story with me.

Senator Toni Boucher, at a recent Education Committee public hearing stated that legislators often send mixed messages. I believe this is a case of a mixed message. Those who support this bill want us to celebrate the supposed dignity and free choice it provides. Why, then, do we not celebrate when a soldier or a student commits suicide? What is the difference between a teen, so overwhelmed by bullying, broken family life, or self-hatred as to want to kill himself, and an adult so burdened by pressures, grief, fear or despair as to want to kill himself?

Most suicide cases are brought on by a mental frame of reference or way of looking at the circumstances in one's life, which brings a person to the point of no hope. Just last week Senator John Kissel said that "we want to be a society where we encourage hope and second chances." Obviously a terminal illness is a difficult challenge for all parties involved, but we have seen time and again that when someone has hope, it greatly improves their situation. We remember the great proverb, "A cheerful heart doeth good like a medicine."

The last incident I will relate is that our family recently watched an old episode of "Streets of San Francisco", which as it turned out, seemed timely, in that the program dealt with a psychiatric hospital in which one of the staff, for a donation to the hospital, would terminate the life of a patient, and make it look like they either died of natural causes or committed suicide. This raises a pertinent point, in that this bill states that "The person signing the qualified patient's death certificate shall list the underlying terminal illness as the cause of death." As the program would indicate, this leaves the door open for coercion and abuse, which is a frightening thought.

I urge you to make a stand for the value of each individual's life, and to reject HB 7015.