
**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF
HB 7015: AN ACT CONCERNING AID IN DYING FOR TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS.**

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

MARCH 18, 2015

This statement is being submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition of Reason, a coalition of nontheist and secular organizations in Connecticut. Its members are the Atheist Humanist Society of CT & RI, Camp Quest New England, Connecticut Valley Atheists, Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, Hartford Area Humanists, the Humanist Association of Connecticut, Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County, the Secular Coalition for Connecticut, and the Yale Humanist Community. Our organizations have more than 1,000 members.

The Coalition supports HB 7015: AN ACT CONCERNING AID IN DYING FOR TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS.

We are in favor of this legislation for two reasons. First, it provides mentally competent, terminally ill patients the right to control how they face death at the final stages of their illness, increasing their autonomy and alleviating their fears about end of life suffering. Second, the requirements outlined in the bill prevent abuse and ensure that a decision to request end of life medication will be the patient's decision alone.

We would like to share Nancy Niedzielski's experience with the committee, which is reported in the documentary film by Peter Richardson, "How to Die in Oregon." Nancy's husband, Randy, suffered from a terminal case of brain and spinal cancer. During the final stage of Randy's cancer, the tumors in his brain grew so large that his eyes were forced outward, preventing him from physically being able to close his eyelids. Randy frequently screamed out from the pain and described his suffering as "worse than death." Before he died, Randy asked Nancy to promise him that she would fight to enact end of life legislation in Washington.

It is with the torment of those like Randy in mind that it becomes crystal clear that end of life legislation can bring autonomy, dignity, and peace of mind to terminally ill patients. Surely, it is not for everyone, but that is precisely the point of the law; to provide patients with as many compassionate options as possible and the authority to make their own decisions.

Opponents of end of life proposals frequently argue that this type of legislation is a "slippery slope" that will inevitably lead to abuse of the elderly, disabled, and mentally incompetent. However, nearly 20 years of data collected as a result of the Oregon law – and the law in other states - has proven that those fears, although sincere, were prevented by the thoughtful and meticulous protections contained in the law. The Oregon act mandates rigorous reporting requirements, and according the Oregon Public Health Division, the agency charged with collecting data and reporting on the law, there have been no cases of abuse. Independent studies of the law corroborate this finding. Further, by making this choice legal, we are protecting those who would

seek it out on their own. The Connecticut bill provides even greater protections and requirements than the Oregon law and will provide Connecticut residents with freedom of choice and protections from abuse.

In conclusion, our Coalition would like to emphasize that there is no argument against this bill that is supported by the available facts and evidence. Many opposing this bill are seeking to impose their own world views on others. While some cloak their arguments in fears of abuse, the evidence is clear that end of life laws have not lead to abuse. Instead, end of life laws have done exactly what they purported to do: they have provided choice to the terminally ill in how they face death.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the members of the Judiciary Committee to vote in favor of HB 7015.

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