

Testimony submitted by: Stanley Greenberg, residing in Manchester, CT

Testimony in FAVOR of bill HB 7015

An Act Concerning Aid in Dying For Terminally Ill Patients

I respectfully submit this testimony to the Joint Committee on Judiciary.

After having read bill 7015, which has abundant restrictions and protections, I wondered how people could be opposed to this aid in dying law. So I examined the concerns and arguments put forth by opponents of the legislation, and I found that almost all of them are fallacious in a variety of ways. In this testimony, I critically evaluate some of the assertions made by opponents of this bill.

1. Opponents almost always use unsettling terms such as killing and physician-assisted suicide (or just suicide). Such terms are disallowed in bill 7015 and are prejudicially applied to aid in dying. My oral testimony addresses the use and misuse of the word "suicide", so I will not repeat that here.
2. They appeal to emotion and fear. For example, opponents warn that:
  - Assisted suicide is dangerous to people with disabilities and to other vulnerable people.
  - An assisted suicide law will encourage or legitimize suicide or euthanasia.
  - Seriously ill people will be coerced to end their lives.

Notice that they never explain or substantiate those dire warnings. They never give real-life examples of these assertions because none exist. (Such examples, if they existed, would have to come from the states with death with dignity laws.) By contrast, proponents of aid in dying can and do cite many real-life stories and scenarios. I would ask those who make all those dire claims: Please explain exactly how that would work.

3. Opponents sometimes state "facts" that are simply false. I've read about polls showing that most Connecticut residents are against aid in dying, but the latest Quinnipiac poll (which is more credible than a Knights of Columbus poll, for example) shows nearly two-thirds in favor.
4. They claim that palliative care eliminates the need for an aid in dying law. But for some unfortunate patients, there comes a point where, even with the best palliative care, they'll end up heavily sedated and subjected to degrading medical measures until they finally succumb. Some of those patients would qualify for aid in dying and would gratefully choose to use it, if it were an available option. It would be the most humane and dignified way for them to end their lives. Note that opponents also claim that aid in dying has diminished palliative care in Oregon. To my knowledge, the opposite is true.
5. Some doctors and medical ethicists have complained that aid in dying is at odds with their duty to do no harm. I submit that the highest principle is to do what is best for the patient, and in certain cases, aid in dying is the most humane, respectful, and comforting course of action. Opponents forget – or conveniently overlook -- that in actual practice, only a small number of patients qualify for aid in dying, and not all of them take the prescribed fatal medication. This is borne out by Oregon's experience.

Opponents' ads sometimes imply that an aid in dying law that will result in many ill people taking their lives prematurely because they'll be pressured to do so. Again, I say, explain exactly how this will happen. And by the way, has it ever happened in the seventeen years that Oregon has had its death with dignity law? Not that I know of.

6. Another objection raised by some opponents is that the aid in dying law requires that the death certificate list the underlying illness as being the cause of death, whereas the "real" cause of death is suicide. This is an obstinately literal and ill-natured way to look at it. In reality, the underlying illness is about to end the patient's life in a miserable manner, so the patient takes a medication to end it on his/her own terms. The patient's role in his/her death occurred because of the illness, not because the patient decided to commit suicide for no reason. Listing the illness as the cause of death is the final way to preserve the patient's dignity, which is what this is all about.
7. It is well known that some religious groups object to an aid in dying law. My reply is that it will have no deleterious effect on them or anyone who does not want to use it. It is simply wrong for their beliefs to deprive others of this option.
8. I would say to quite a few of the people who oppose this bill, "Have you actually read it?"

Opponents know that most people are not very well informed about bill 7015; most of their "knowledge" comes from what they read or hear. Scary rhetoric like what I've examined here causes people to perceive aid in dying as a law that will hurt a lot of unfortunate people. It will not.

I hope the Committee will be disposed to analyze opponents' objections and assertions critically and with a large dose of skepticism.

This aid in dying law will be extremely important to - and tremendously appreciated by - the very small number of people who are able and inclined to use it. And no one else, individually or as a group or as society, will be affected by it.

I respectfully ask the members of the Judiciary Committee to favorably report bill HB 7015. Thank you.

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