

OPPOSE HR 7015 Act Concerning Aid to Terminally Ill Patients 3/15/15

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am opposed to any form of "aid to dying" that involves allowing a person to end their own life and I urge you to vote no to this bill H.R. 7015 and any other that uses the term "aid" to include prescriptions for lethal chemicals or any other means to kill human life.

In my role in providing bereavement services at a funeral home, I have found that suicide is one of the worst experiences family members can ever go through. They are often hit broad-sided, never expecting their loved one to choose to die this way, and the emotional pain this causes can be so severe that they are left unable to function on their jobs or in their roles as parents, have required long term professional care, medication and sometimes hospitalization. Do you want to further burden society with the pain of the aftermath of suicide? I hope not.

In my personal experience of "aiding the dying", I can tell you that my dying family members felt like they were a burden to others. They didn't want to burden anyone with having to see them in their suffering. In my brother's case, his cancer had spread to his brain and other areas of his body. He would have been riddled with pain but his medication was very well managed and he was kept comfortable. In his family life, he had "falling outs" with key members of his immediate family. Never in his wildest dreams would he have imagined that those people would have been there for him in his dying days. Because of pain management, he had the opportunity not only to see his children and his ex-wife and his sisters, but he also had his old buddies from many years before who traveled to see him and shared happy memories, laughter and tears with each other prior to his death. I can tell you, my brother died happily because of these caring interactions, but if he had the option to take a pill to end it all, he may very well have done so. Because of his state of mind, he simply didn't believe that he would have had all those people there for him in his last days. It would have been devastating to his family members and friends if he had done this, and I think for him as well.

Four years ago my mother died on an Alzheimer's floor of a nursing home. My children and I were with her. Rather than invasive measures, she chose palliative care. She died peacefully, with us praying with her, listening to her favorite hymns, having a visit from the priest to provide the Anointing of the Sick and I was holding her hand at her death, providing her the assurance she needed. She didn't want to "burden" us either. But love bears all things, and the moments we shared with her prior to her death are among my most tender memories of her. She died peacefully and she was very happy we were there. It wasn't awful. With God's grace, we were all fine. If people are given emotional and spiritual support at the end of life, it makes an enormous difference in their dying. A person's "usefulness" to society should not be part of a decision about whether they receive compassion and care to preserve their life, without using extraordinary means. Health care providers have a very sacred role to preserve life and aid in well-being. No one should tamper with that role by introducing the concept of "aid" as being lethal. To redefine health care in such a way is a lie. Please do not support the proponents to this bill. Instead, provide more aid to hospice and palliative care, which are truly life giving professions that provide true aid to terminally ill patients.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Hart-Banach  
145 Starr Avenue  
Newington, CT 06111