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Subject: Testimony re: right to physician-assisted aid in dying

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To: phc.testimony@cga.ct.gov

I'm Judith Passmore, a retired health care manager, from Middletown, CT, testifying in favor of HB 5326. (2015: ????)

I'm not asking, or even suggesting, that any person have physician-assisted aid in dying forced upon them. But I am here to say that I would surely love to have the CHOICE to create an advance directive that would allow me to have that option for myself! If I reach that point where 'living' offers no possible further benefit to me or the world, I'd like to know that a physician can legally offer me a safe, pain-free means of freedom.

My father was a strong, independent, creative, funny and deeply caring man who suffered more than two years with an intensely painful cancer that led to five increasingly invasive surgeries. He was happy to undergo any and all treatments that might stop the cancer.

Throughout his illness and those surgeries, he fought the cancer intensely, but he hated taking the prescribed pain medications, as they made him incapable of thinking clearly, communicating well, and pursuing the creative activities that were his primary source of joy. I once caught him literally banging his head against the basement wall to try to replace the inner head pain with an outer, more tolerable and controllable, one.

By Christmas, near the end of his final hospitalization, the cancer had begun to cut off circulation to his brain, and he was 'not himself' at times; he was desperately afraid he would say or do something mean or hurtful when he wasn't in control.... and he knew that he had lost the fight.

He had removed the tubes through which he received nutrition and medication one night and been caught before he died staff had *fastened his*

hands to ping-pong paddles and tied them to the bed sides. He begged me to untie just one hand so that he could try again. Helping him would be a punishable crime, so I asked him to let me think overnight. I talked about it with my mother, who told me—vehemently—that she would have me arrested for murder if I helped him. As much as I wanted to let my father have the peace and power to end his life, I did not. He died three weeks later. I have regretted—my lack of courage in the ensuing 40 years.

My mother, at the Christmas in question, was in another hospital, also with cancer. Their conditions overlapped. Hers was an abdominal cancer that was so metastasized by the time they found it that they could not be sure of the origin. Uterine cancer was considered the most likely source.

Her cancer had advanced to such a degree before it was discovered because she was a rare patient who experienced absolutely NO pain, before *and* during the two-and-a-half year period she lived *after* the cancer was discovered. She was released from the hospital after my father passed and lived fully until three months before her passing. At that point, she was hospitalized, down from 150 to 53 pounds, because she could no longer care for herself or survive at home. She was still without pain.

A nurse who changed a dressing on her shoulder left a pair of scissors on her pillow. Mother took the scissors and spent most of the day stabbing at herself all over her body, when no one was looking, trying to make herself bleed out and die.

My brother asked me to come home before my usual visit. Just before I left, she told me what she had done, and I couldn't hold back...I asked her why, after the good fortune of suffering NO pain through all that time, and knowing that she was literally at death's door, she would gamble on causing herself a painful death. She had planned her funeral in detail, and doctors had told her she would only live a few more days. She could not give me an answer, and I left to return to work several states away. Mother passed before I got back to work. And I returned immediately.

At her funeral, the hospital chaplain embraced me, saying that my mother's final words were: "My daughter is the only one who understood me!"

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These two experiences — and the miserable deaths of other friends and relatives —helped frame my desire to have the option to choose quick, painless physician-assisted aid in dying at a point when I will no longer be able to live without pain or artificial support and machines...or when I am 'non compus mentis' ... no longer able to recognize or participate in the world around me, etc., ... to see beauty or experience humor... and know that those conditions will only worsen. I cannot imagine a good reason to keep this body – this mechanical container – functioning artificially when no improvement is likely.

1. I do not believe that "I" am skin, bones, and other body parts. I AM a soul that should be freed to go on—to heaven or whatever your belief system would suggest—when there is no value to be gained or given in being here—or no participation possible, in this body.
2. I'm frightened about the quality of care I might receive at a point in my life when I can no longer let my wishes be known, since there would be no one here to advocate on my behalf

Again, it's **choice** that I ask for...not a mandate for anyone. And, for those who believe that they haven't the desire or right to make such a choice, I'm 100% in favor of their ability to make that choice. I am not seeking to change anyone else's belief. The point is that each individual—**all**—be allowed to choose—within our own belief system and logic—our means and time of departure from 'this earthly plain'. As I said at the beginning of this statement, if I reach that point where 'living' offers no further benefit to me or the world, I'd like to know that a physician can offer me a safe, pain-free means of freedom.

Finally, if the Legislature refuses to pass legislation to permit this choice ***because they fear that the law would be misused***, then how could they pass ANY legislation about ANYthing?... Because ANY law can be misused if someone tries hard enough to find a loophole or chooses to ignore the legal requirements and potential retribution.

Thank you for humane — and pragmatic — consideration.

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