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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 suggesting, that any person have physician-assisted death forced upon them. But I am here because I would really love to be able to create an advance directive that would let me CHOOSE that option for myself! If I reach that point where 'living' offers no possibility of joy, or communication with family or friends, I'd like to know that a physician can legally provide me with 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 in his head. He was happy to undergo any and all treatments that might stop the cancer.

Throughout his illness and those surgeries, he fought hard, but he hated taking the prescribed pain medications, as they made his thinking fuzzy, communicating difficult, and pursuing the creative activities—that were his primary source of joy—impossible. On one visit, I caught him literally banging his head against the basement wall to try to replace the cancer pain with one he could control. By Christmas, near the end of his final hospitalization, the cancer was cutting off circulation to his brain, and he was 'not himself' at times; he became desperately afraid he would hurt someone when he wasn't in control.... He knew he had lost the fight, and he wanted to die.

One night, Dad pulled out the tubes used for nutrition and medication, to kill himself. Staff found him, scolded him like a child, he said, and *fastened his hands to ping-pong paddles and tied them to the bed sides*. When I visited, he begged me to untie just one hand so he could try again.

Helping him would be a 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 for 40 years.

My mother, at that time, was in another hospital, also with cancer. Their conditions overlapped. Hers was stage four 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. She was a rare cancer patient who experienced absolutely NO pain, even during the two-and-a-half years she lived *after* diagnosis. She was released from the hospital after my father passed and lived actively for more than a year, before being hospitalized again, three months before her passing. At that point, she was down from 150 to 53 pounds, bedridden, and unable to care for herself or survive at home. She was still pain-free.

One morning, a nurse changed a dressing on her shoulder and 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—unsuccessfully—to make herself bleed out and die.

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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 compos 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 / spirit 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, due to belief system, 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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