

Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2015

In Opposition to Raised Bill HB 7015 – An Act Providing A Medical Option Of Compassionate Aid In Dying For Terminally Ill Adults

My name is Sister Linda Pepe, CSJ, and I am a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry. As a member of a faith community, I am very much opposed to HB 7015. I believe in the sacredness of life, and reverence all life as a gift from conception to natural death. Natural death, not one hastened by a medical option, even if labeled as “compassionate aid in dying.” The Catholic Church does not say that we must prolong life, when there is no possibility that the quality of life will improve. It allows for the option of an individual to request that all extraordinary measures to prolong life be withheld. The difference is, the person in this scenario dies a natural death, unlike the “medical option of compassionate aid in dying” that determines the day, if not the hour, of death. There is nothing “natural” in the second scenario; death is the result of an extraordinary interference.

This bill before you starts us down a slippery slope. If this Bill passes, the individual can determine when he or she has endured enough pain to call it quits. We have all heard stories of individuals given a diagnosis of a terminal illness only to find out that either the diagnosis or the time frame was incorrect. Doctors, a blessing to be sure, are only human and subject to human error. This is just the start of the slope. We all have control over our lives, and I am sure some here have experienced terminally ill patients who just gave up and died. That is far different from this bill that must enlist the aid of a doctor to prescribe medication to end one’s life. Who is to say that, if this bill passes, in a year or two we will not see an amendment being proposed that will allow a family member of a terminally ill and unresponsive individual to ask a physician for a medical option to aid in dying?

As we continue the journey down this slippery slope, I would ask you to consider the medical oath taken by doctors which reads in part , “. . .I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; . . .” If this Bill is passed, are we legislating that doctors violate their oath? The Bill, as written, indicates a doctor must prescribe this “compassionate aid” to a patient. How is that not a violation of their oath? The drugs prescribed for the patient will terminate a life. This “compassionate aid” request of a doctor is very different than a doctor prescribing morphine for hospice patients or for individuals in palliative care. Morphine manages the pain of the dying individual while in hospice or palliative care until death occurs; “compassionate aid” determines the day, if not the hour, that death will occur.

This issue is very complicated and involves more than just the opinions or stories of those suffering a terminal illness. Perhaps this issue is not meant to be in the legislature. As this debate continues, you will need the wisdom of Solomon and the courage of David to address this issue.

As legislators elected to propose and pass laws to protect the citizens of Connecticut, I am asking that you consider carefully all the facets and ramifications of this issue before allowing this “medical option of compassionate aid in dying” to become law.

Thank You,
Sister Linda Pepe, CSJ
Canton, CT