

Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Julianna Bennett and I am here in strong opposition to HB 5417. There is a statement commonly made when the subject of assisted suicide comes up: "Unbearable pain is the major reason people choose Physician Assisted Suicide." I have heard people say, "If I were sitting in the chair, waiting for the next shot of morphine, I would choose assisted suicide." While imagining themselves in the situation described, many people fail to check out the facts. The fact is, the 3 most frequently mentioned end of life concerns are loss of autonomy, decreasing ability to take part in activities that made life enjoyable and loss of dignity. Not unbearable pain. Who falls into those three categories? The elderly, the disabled, and the weak. These are the people who would be most affected by this bill.

My grandmother was a rare mix of gentleness and strength. She bore and raised nine sturdy children, she cared for her own parents, in-laws and aunts in their old age. I remember seeing her hands always busy in the act of service to others. As a young adult, I took those hands in mine and helped my grandma up a flight of steps. I steadied her walker, I helped her sit down and stand up. For the short time she lived with my family, I slept on a couch near her bed and assisted her to the bathroom in the night. Many times we would lay awake and talk, long after we were supposed to be asleep. There were times of discouragement for her when she wondered if she was a burden to us. She didn't realize that her very helplessness taught me invaluable lessons in patience, in caring, in compassion, in self-sacrifice. I learned more as a young person walking by Grandma's side than I would have ever imagined.

The time came when I sat beside her as she lay in a strange and unfamiliar hospital bed. The hospital staff provided care to ease the physical suffering the process of death brought, but there was something they could not provide and that was the loving presence of people who cared being at her side. That came from my extended family. During the last week of Grandma's life, my aunts and uncles worked out a rotation so that one of her children was always with her, by night and by day.

Through interacting with my grandmother and other elderly people, I have seen the natural depression that comes with old age. The loss of independence and clarity of thought can be discouraging. By involving Grandma in our lives and taking her out, her life was extended. Yes there were moments of discouragement, but these were outweighed by moments of laughter and fun.

Our elderly don't need something that will cause them, in their despondant state of mind, to take their lives. Let's not show misguided compassion by helping them commit suicide. Let's show compassion and care by taking their hands in our own and matching our stride to their feeble steps. Let's assist hope, not suicide.