

Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Kathryn Bennett, and I am speaking today in strong opposition to HB 5417. I remember when my grandfather was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He was the first person I knew with a terminal illness. He told of another man with the same diagnosis who went out and shot himself because he couldn't bear the thought of living with the pain. I remember my grandfather expressing gratefulness that his faith in God gave him the courage to face his illness.

My family had a friend that suffered the debilitating disease of ALS, and I had the unique opportunity to help his wife as she stood by him throughout the battle. The time I spent with their family caused me to realize that an illness does not only impact the person diagnosed, but also the people that are closest to them.

Through ALS, our friend lost his ability to walk, move his arm, and breathe without the aid of a respirator. I also saw his family, nurses and aides who surrounded him with love and care. It can be discouraging to feel like you are a burden to others, and on one occasion, he told me that he regretted being a burden to his wife and me. But the thought occurred to me, and I told him, "When people treasure something, they don't mind investing their time and energy into the object of their value. We value your life, and we don't mind the time invested in helping you."

One of the reasons I oppose any bill legalizing assisted suicide is because I believe it will pressure our vulnerable elderly and disabled citizens to take their own lives as they feel that they are burdening others. Our friend with ALS lost his ability to function normally, but he still added value to the lives of those around him; each day brought a new challenge, but in fighting the disease, our friend encouraged greater strength in his family and friends.

Any person being diagnosed with a terminal illness can easily lose their hope and feel that an answer in death is their only choice. However, that is the tragic case with any person who commits suicide, from veterans to young people in our schools: people in our communities choose suicide because they have lost sight of purpose and hope. A desire to take one's own life is unhealthy and results in hurting others.

I believe true compassion will guide us to help people in the midst of suffering find their mission in life; to reach beyond their own pain and minister to the pain of others. Once again I urge you to reject this bill.