



## **Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care**

### **TESTIMONY**

**Delivered by Sister Suzanne Gross, F.S.E., Administrator  
Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care**

Before the Public Health Committee

March 20, 2018

**Testimony in opposition to HB 5417  
An Act Concerning End-of-Life Care**

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. I am Sister Suzanne Gross. I am the Administrator of Franciscan Home Care and Hospice Care and have served in the health care ministry for more than 35 years. Our agency serves individuals and families in 30 towns. In our various home health care programs, we have 180 employees, 15 Franciscan Sisters, and 16 volunteers. I am here to oppose HB 5417 because it gives terminally ill persons the wrong message. Life is precious—their life is precious. I have served people of all faiths and of no faith over these past years and what is true of all, as death draws near, every patient provides us with a special opportunity to care, and to be there for patients, family members and friends, and to help them know they are important to us.

In Connecticut we have excellent hospice providers who daily provide compassionate care to those who are terminal. Palliative care has improved remarkably over the years. Clinical persons are here today addressing the advances in pain management that have developed through the years countering effectively why this bill does not offer a solution but creates more problems. At the end of life, it is my experience that the dying patient longs for support, the opportunity to complete unfinished business, time to reconcile with family and

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friends. We need to remember that there is a difference between pain and suffering. I received the story of a son and his mother. The son wrote, “What I have learned is that suffering can bring out the best in people. My mother’s suffering brought about heroic love in those who cared for her . . . All she had was love . . . and that love transformed everyone around her.” This story is repeated every day where there are devoted caregivers, loving family members, and dedicated hospice providers.

Instead of focusing on eliminating the pain and suffering, the arguments of those promoting HB 5326 are focused on eliminating the patient or the sufferer. There is an avoidance of the use of the word “suicide” in this bill, which is unfortunate, because that is what the bill encourages and endorses. To help another end their life makes a statement about the willingness to live beside the other, to care for the other, to actually co-suffer with the other. To suffer is to love every person, not just those who are terminally ill. To love is to assume the burdens of the other. I might add when the society affirms suicide, the society plants seeds of support for suicide in young people and old people, which results many times in more pain and suffering as loved ones, parents, children, grieve the loss of those unexpected deaths.

There was a letter to the editor of Connecticut newspapers from a resident of Oregon that was given to me. Her name is Jeannette Hall. I want to read this because she re-enforces our grave concerns about HB 5417.

“In my state, assisted suicide is legal, and I was disturbed to read that Connecticut is considering a similar law. Assisted suicide has been legal here in Oregon since 1997. It was enacted by a ballot measure I voted for. In 2000, I was diagnosed with cancer and told I had six months to a year to live. I knew the law had passed, but I didn’t know exactly how to go about doing it. I tried to ask my doctor, but he didn’t really answer me. In hindsight, he was stalling me, trying to get me to change my mind.

I did not want to suffer. I wanted to use our state law, and I wanted my doctor to help me. Instead, he encouraged me not to give up, and ultimately, I decided to fight. I received chemotherapy and radiation. It has been early 17 years, and I am so happy to be alive! Assisted suicide should NOT be legal. Oregon has made a terrible mistake.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and to hear my concerns. Again, I ask for the sake of the dignity of human life and true

compassionate care giving, you oppose HB 5417. If you have any questions, please contact me at 203-238-1441.

Submitted by  
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