



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

March 18, 2019

The Honorable Sen. Mary Daugherty Abrams
The Honorable Rep. Jonathan Steinberg
Co-Chairs, Joint Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3000
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Re: SUPPORT for HB 5898, Testimony from American Atheists in support of a bill allowing for medical aid-in-dying

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and Members of the Joint Public Health Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its nearly 600 constituents in Connecticut, thanks you for considering HB 5898, a vital measure that will ensure that terminally ill adults have access to compassionate end-of-life care options and medical aid-in-dying. This legislation will reduce government interference in the personal lives of citizens by allowing people who are terminally ill to make fundamentally personal decisions about their health care and lives. We urge you to swiftly pass this important bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans, American Atheists objects to efforts to subordinate medical care to the religious beliefs of providers and institutions.

HB 5898 would establish a path for terminally ill patients in Connecticut to receive medical aid-in-dying, setting up a process in partnership between the individual and their health care provider. States that have chosen to enact medical aid in dying legislation have been successful in providing comfortable and dignified end of life care for terminally ill individuals.

For example, the state of Oregon passed a medical aid-in-dying law in 1997, and since that time, the process established by law has functioned as intended. There has been no evidence of abuse by providers, nor of loss of control by terminally ill patients.¹ Studies of the Oregon Death with Dignity Act found that, “persons dying in Oregon are less likely to be hospitalized and more likely to use hospice services at home.” Furthermore, in 2013 nearly two-thirds of Oregonians died within in their own home, including 97% of individuals that used medical aid-in-dying processes established by the Death with Dignity Act. Nationally, however, although approximately 80% of Americans desire to pass in the comfort of their own home, less than 20% actually do so.² Instead, 60% of Americans die in acute care hospitals, often after receiving unwanted medical care.

Research shows that 73% of Americans support medical aid in dying for terminally ill patients, and yet only 8 states have passed laws establishing medical aid-in-dying processes.³ Connecticut should join them by passing this legislation to allow for better end-of-life options for its residents.

HB 5898 would create a patient-driven system that honors an individual’s values and beliefs. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation to allow terminally ill people in Connecticut to choose to die with peace and dignity. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists’ support for HB 5898, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x309 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Very truly yours,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Vice President, Legal and Policy
American Atheists

cc: All Members of the Connecticut Joint Public Health Committee

¹ Tolle SW & Teno JM. (2017). Lessons from Oregon in Embracing Complexity in End-of-Life Care. *New England Journal of Medicine*. No. 376, Mar. 2017, pp. 1078-1082.

² Bailey A & Periyakoil VJ. (2018). Home Hospice: Home Care of the Dying Patient. Stanford School of Medicine. Available at <https://palliative.stanford.edu/home-hospice-home-care-of-the-dying-patient/where-do-americans-die/>.

³ Wood J & McCarthy J. (2017). Majority of Americans Remain Supportive of Euthanasia. Gallup, May 3-7, 2017. Available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/211928/majority-americans-remain-supportive-euthanasia.aspx>.