

Connecticut General Assembly
Public Health Committee

Re: Hearing on HB5417

I write to you in support of Aid in Dying. I am a Board Certified General Surgeon and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, now retired after a practice of over thirty years. I have also served as Chairperson of the Danbury Hospital Ethics Committee.

I believe that physicians should be able to provide prescriptions for terminally ill, mentally competent patients to achieve a peaceful death with dignity, unless that physician has a religious or moral objection. This serves both the patients and physicians principle of autonomy.

Aid-in-dying is already the law in five states (Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado, Vermont) and Washington D.C. Those laws -- some of which have been in practice for nearly two decades without changes or problems -- are very similar to legislation that has been proposed in Connecticut.

In study after study, respected, peer reviewed medical journals such as JAMA and the New England Journal of Medicine have proven that in states with aid-in-dying laws, end of life care has improved, hospice usage has increased, and with critical safeguards in place, vulnerable populations are not at risk. Review of the state of Oregon data since inception further verifies these characteristics.

Further, organizations such as the American Public Health Association (APHA), American Medical Students Association (AMSA), the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), the American Board of Legal Medicine (ABLM) as well as the American Medical Students Association (AMSA) all support aid in dying.

Many persons ask if the Hippocratic Oath precludes physicians from helping patients die? The Hippocratic Oath is no longer used at any United States medical school graduation. Like the U.S Constitution many of its important principles endure while the application of those ideals has evolved over time. The standards of 21st Century medical ethics can be found within it: Patient Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-Maleficence and Social Justice. And most of all duty to one's patients and the patient's desires and goals. While physicians can now prolong and extend life, shared medical decision making obliges the doctor to embrace fully informed consent, especially in care at the end of life. Medical professionals can no longer simply fight disease at any cost, but must help patients weigh risks, benefits and quality of life as they make their medical choices.

I encourage you to consider my thoughts. I close with a quote: "The wise person doesn't ask how long I can live, but when is the right time to die". Lucius Annaeus Seneca, (4 BC-AD 65) Roman philosopher, statesman and dramatist during the Silver Age of Latin Literature.

Sincerely,

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