

To the Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee,

I write to you today to express my deep desire for you to oppose any further discussion of the bill HB5417. Considering the thought of a codified law allowing doctors to assist in the killing of their patients, I am filled with many thoughts and emotions. This testimony will focus its attention on three of the most pertinent.

Firstly I am deeply troubled and disappointed that the legislators of the state I am proud to call home, would consider it appropriate to revise the principles of medicine so to allow doctors to do direct harm to their patients. I'm further troubled by the fact that such a change in law would invariably effect the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the population. It's unconscionable to think that the strong and healthy would permit legislation that makes the killing of the weak and sick a legitimate enterprise. The hallmark of a civilized society is that it treats its most vulnerable citizens with love and compassion. Instead, this bill would create a misperception that the sick and disabled are burdensome and expendable. As a good and compassionate society we should seek out ways to protect the vulnerable and make them feel safe and comfortable as they transition toward a natural death.

Secondly, I am angered that this proposed bill would do more to protect medical professionals than do anything to provide care for their patients. The legislation as I understand it would simply absolve the physician of any wrongdoing for prescribing lethal doses and combinations of medicines. The physician writes the script and leaves the patient to die alone, unaware of any possible complications from the medication. Unaware if the potential for undue pain and suffering is realized. We are more compassionate to criminals facing execution. They at least are monitored to ensure that cruel and unusual complications do not occur. We then frustrate the situation further by sanitizing the public records by declaring the patient's death as a result of their underlying medical condition. It would seem that such a law does little for the sick and suffering. Instead it only protects the medical professionals from the consequences of violating the first principle of medicine, and it seeks to protect the public conscience by denying the truth surrounding the patient's death.

Lastly, I write you to express my confusion. As I understand it, this topic has been considered several times in the past. Each time it has been decided that allowing doctors to assist in the suicide of their patients is a bad idea. It runs in direct opposition to the purpose of medicine. I'm confused, because I see no real change in the public's understanding of this issue or of medicine in general. This was a bad idea the first time it was considered and has been a bad idea every time since then. In fact, it will always be a bad idea, because terminating the life of a person is never the appropriate solution to a person's problems. It can never be in the public interest to legitimize suicide as an answer to difficulties.

I respectfully request that your committee table this discussion and decline to consider such bills if they are introduced in the future. Our state should be known as a place where all our citizens are valued.

Thank you,

Peter Reichenberger (Shelton)