

[H.B.5417](#) – Favor – A Matter of “Pre-Constitutional” Rights

Judiciary Committee
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Chairs and members of the Committee, my name is Luther Weeks, a member of the Secular Coalition for Connecticut Legislative Acton Committee, a Member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a Humanist, and like Founder Tom Paine, atheist and committed to reason and common sense. This testimony is my own and has not been endorsed by the Coalition nor by any organization of which I am a member or may be associated.

I am not a lawyer, let alone a Constitutional lawyer, yet I am familiar with the concept of *Pre-Constitutional Rights*, which form the basis for our government. Many are declared and recognized in the *Declaration of Independence*. The entire legitimacy of the United States and the Connecticut constitutions rests on its declaration that “*Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed*”. There are other pre-constitutional rights, “*among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*”. **It occurs to me that these certain unalienable rights apply today, if, as I recommend, we continue to hold to the promises and ideals of our democracy.**

Life: The right to *Life* includes responsibility for how one lives their own one precious life. We have just one precious life – too precious for anyone else to choose how we live and to limit what the end will be. As with all rights it has limits and must be balanced against both other rights and the rights of others.

Liberty: The right to *Liberty* includes choice for how one lives their own one precious life. We have a long tradition of avoiding limiting what others can do or can ingest as long as they do not directly harm others, even if their choices can be costly to society. We allow anyone to eat whatever food and drink they choose even if it results in an early death, along with significant healthcare, disability, and other social costs. For example, we limit where individuals may smoke, where they can drink, and what they can do after drinking only to the extent that it is directly harmful to others. We have grown as a society moving ever closer to the ideals of the Constitution, allowing all to vote, allowing all to marry, and in a growing number of states allowing all or those ravaged with disease to use marijuana.

and, The Pursuit of Happiness: The *Pursuit of Happiness* is perhaps the most obvious right that would be protected and provided by this bill. **I was executor for the estate of my cousin, who died of brain cancer five and one-half years ago. I sat with him in his last day of struggle in life – I do not know what his choice would have been, yet I would wish that he had that choice to end his live when he chose,** even if after due consideration he chose not to exercise it. Diagnosed just two months earlier, he chose wisely for no curative treatment. He was able to put his affairs in order, create a will a few days before he died, able to drive and shop until the last five days, conscious and able to make decisions until two days prior to natural death. In those last couple of days he could not have chosen to end it before the final struggle and vast pain. He chose hospice and at least avoided something that could have been much worse, and much much longer.

I understand that aid-in-dying is supported by an overwhelming majority of the voters of Connecticut. **H.B. 5417 would provide a human right; even if you agree only that it is justified by just one of the rights of life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness; even if this right were only desired or supported by a small minority of residents; even if you personally would not make that choice, you should support it in the name of democracy, human rights, and the Declaration of Independence.**

Thank you.

HUMANISM AND ITS ASPIRATIONS

Humanist Manifesto III, a successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933*

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

The lifeway of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.

This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:

Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.

Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifeway of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.

Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.