



Submission regarding Bill C-14

The Toronto Board of Rabbis, while encouraged by certain provisions in Bill C-14 that move toward protecting vulnerable individuals from coerced suicide, continue to maintain significant reservations concerning this bill.

As rabbis, we represent a tradition that places great stress on human dignity and the sanctity of life. We recognize that individuals and their families face challenging personal situations when dealing with extremely debilitating illnesses with little or no possibility of cure or comfort. Many of us have been with families at these trying times.

Caring for others in their most difficult times is a core Jewish value. We believe that patients must have full knowledge of and access to quality, affordable palliative services. Informed consent must include consultation with a palliative care specialist. A patient who lacks the full understanding of the many options available to reduce pain and suffering cannot give informed consent.

There are many reasons why an individual may opt for physician assisted death. The legislation must concern itself with legitimate and illegitimate motives. Specifically, the legislation must be clearer that consent must not come about through any form of external pressure or inducement. For example, as rabbis involved in spiritual care, we have often witnessed families struggle during the prolonged illness of a loved one. It is not uncommon for the dying patient to believe that were he or she to die quickly, his or her family would stop fighting. The legislation must focus on the suffering of the patient and make clear that other motivating factors are deemed illegitimate reasons for permitting physical assisted death.

As physical assisted dying becomes legalized it will quickly become normalized within the medical community. The ability and desire to cross carefully determined legislative lines will quickly become real. Vulnerable people though legislatively protected, in the course of implementation, will inevitably become at risk. The establishment of a national monitoring and reporting system is needed to ensure the long term protection of vulnerable people.

To be clear, failure to ensure effective safeguards for the protection of vulnerable individuals moves the Province of Ontario from being facilitator in the provision of health care to becoming an accomplice in murder.

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Finally, the final legislation must respect the sincerely held religious and philosophical beliefs of individual and institutional health-care providers that it is never acceptable to assist actively in another's death. The legislation must include provisions for individuals and institutions to report requests for physical assisted death to a third-party, which will then be responsible for follow-up consultations and, if appropriate, facilitating physician assisted death. Judaism does not allow for individuals or Jewish institutions to participate actively in the death of another human being. The legislation must respect this stance.