



Société Santé
en français



CONSORTIUM NATIONAL
DE FORMATION EN SANTÉ



ACUFC

ASSOCIATION DES COLLÈGES ET UNIVERSITÉS
DE LA FRANCOPHONIE CANADIENNE

Ottawa, May 9, 2016

Anthony Housefather, PC
Member for Mont Royal and
Chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Subject: Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)

Dear Mr. Housefather,

For the second reading of Bill C-14, which was sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that you chair, your committee conducted a brief consultation period, during which you heard from various witnesses and received a number of written submissions. On behalf of the Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) and the Société Santé en français (SSF), we would like to share with you our concerns and recommendations regarding this significant bill.

In Canada, more than 1.2 million Francophones live outside Quebec. These Canadians often face significant language barriers when they interact with healthcare workers. This situation presents a safety risk for these people and diminishes the quality of the care and services they receive. The ability to communicate with healthcare workers in the official language of their choice is thus a major issue, particularly when a patient must provide informed consent to request medical assistance in dying. The offer of French language health services in Francophone minority environments thus goes well beyond the *Official Languages Act*: it is an issue of quality, safety, legitimacy and ethics.

As expressed by the witnesses who appeared before your committee, it is important that medical assistance in dying reflect the true and free choice of the individuals who request it. However, this free choice may be compromised for people who are particularly vulnerable due to their inability, or reduced ability, to communicate in their second official language in a mainly Anglophone setting and medical environment. These people will also find it more difficult to build relationships of trust with their healthcare professionals and to obtain the necessary guidance if they cannot interact directly with their designated professionals.

For this reason, we ask that the bill include explicit measures to guarantee the offer of health services in the official language chosen by the patients who request medical assistance in dying. We believe that these measures will help to guarantee that individuals who request medical assistance in dying will do so

freely, independently and with a full understanding of their cases. The SSF and the CNFS hope that Bill C-14 will take into account the realities of life for Canadians living in Francophone minority communities throughout the country.

The shared mission of the CNFS and the SSF is to expand the offer of and access to safe, high-quality health services in Francophone minority communities throughout the country. The SSF is a national leader that, along with its 16 regional, provincial and territorial networks, works to coordinate interested partners to improve access to French language health services in all provinces and territories where French is not the majority language. The CNFS, under the banner of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC), is a pan-Canadian group of 11 colleges and universities that offer French-language programs in a variety of health-related disciplines, with regional partners that help to improve access to these programs throughout the country. The initiatives of both our organizations are made possible thanks to the financial support of Health Canada under the *Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018: education, immigration and communities*.

We would be pleased to answer any questions or to provide additional information. Please note also that you may count on the support of both our organizations on all issues concerning French-language healthcare services in Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Lynn Brouillette
Acting Executive Director
Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne



Michel Tremblay
Executive Director
Société Santé en français

c.c. Chair of the Standing Committee on Health
Chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages
Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages