

Re: Bill C-14

May 1, 2016

Dear Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,

We are grateful for your service as Parliamentarians and on this committee, especially given the very difficult nature of the subject of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Both my husband and myself have worked our careers in the public sector. I worked in Saskatoon Health District as a nurse for 28 years in many and varied situations with people in crisis and health stress. My husband worked with the Saskatoon Police Department at the same time, often encountering suicides and individuals in life and death circumstances. Thank you for asking for input from Canadians and for taking the time to consider our views on this issue.

We are of the many Canadians who do not support any law permitting euthanasia or assisted-suicide and were grieved when the Supreme Court struck down the laws last year. We believe human life is inherently worthy of protection by the law and that humans have no right to assist others in dying or to request assistance in dying. As the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) pointed out in their report, you have the opportunity to propose new legislation that completely prohibits assisted suicide. We humbly ask you to consider doing so. Once the door is opened, it cannot be shut; it only gets wider.

If Parliament refuses to recommend absolute protections for all humans, we ask that you work to ensure that the strictest of safeguards are put in place to protect vulnerable Canadians (those who may be in a state of depression, who may be under coercion from family or others to end their lives, the elderly, the disabled or children). We are also writing to share some specific concerns we have for your consideration.

We are very concerned with the subjectivity of the terms “unbearable” pain and “mentally-competent” set forth by the Supreme Court. The subjectivity puts physicians in a position to ‘play God’ with people’s lives during a vulnerable time in their life. To help reduce these dangers, we recommend that independent, third-party reviews are required before all proposed deaths. Additionally, as you review these terms, we know you will ensure clear, objective definitions as much as possible.

We have experienced the slow death and decline of each of our mothers and my father. We were involved in their care and experienced dignity in dying even when life supports were removed. Allowing a person to die is quite different than hastening their death.

We are concerned that reports show that in Belgium, one third of euthanasia deaths were done without explicit consent in spite of a law requiring consent. We are deeply concerned with the fact that safeguards cannot eliminate abuse and unintended deaths, especially as one who works in a health care system that is supposed to promote patient centred care but often falls short of empowering patients to make informed decisions and ensuring explicit consent to all interventions. If you have not already done so, please refer to this link for reports from Belgium addressed to Canada regarding this proposed legislation: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWgUhHU2DsxRcTlwBXLtFig> “Vulnerable Film: Belgium Warns Canada”

We are concerned by the multitude of medical cases of people who were unconscious for a period of time only to come out of that state and report that they were aware of everything happening around them during their state of unconsciousness, as well as the many cases of medical miracles where people recovered in-spite of medical science deeming them terminal. Furthermore, it is in the end/terminal stages of life that people come face to face with the reality of death and are given the chance to seriously re-evaluate their lives, faith, and end of life decisions. This should not be rushed or tainted.

Our biggest concern, however, is the current lack of palliative care in Canada. Currently only 15-30% of Canadians have acceptable access to proper palliative care, but physician assisted suicide is to be made available to everyone. This is unjust and may result in unnecessary decisions to forcefully end life. Please put into place safeguards that protect those who may be pressured towards euthanasia in order to not become a burden to their families or society, or those who would be coerced under physical, mental, or emotional distress. I encourage you to focus on improving and extending palliative care and hospice resources rather than concentrating funds and personnel on assisted dying.

Please also ensure the protection of Canadian health care workers (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, other), who have dedicated themselves to saving lives and improving quality of life – not ending them – so that their freedoms of conscience and religion are fully protected under the law. Please fight to protect these freedoms even to the extent of giving them the right to refuse referral of services, and in doing so dismissing them from being forced to participate in the process.

Sincerely,

Joanne & Richard Lepp