

Following a conversation with my 101-year old mother-in-law last evening, I would like to add another perspective to the complex decision that is about to be made.

She is a healthy woman whose mental faculties are sharp. She's legally blind, but reads and watches television all day, and is still walking, doing her own laundry, managing her finances and going out to visit with relatives. Four years ago, she attempted suicide by ingesting a large quantity of heart medication. She chose this method because she had once read in a novel of a person who had done so successfully. It was something that she and her husband had always vowed they would do rather than face possible physical and mental infirmities.

She told us that she has been clipping articles about the proposed legislation and hopes it will be enacted really soon so she can finally be assured of death on her terms. I tried to explain that the bill is intended for others who are in far greater distress than she is, mentioning words like "intractable pain", "complete loss of control over bodily functions" and "loss of mental capacity" and "expected to die soon".

Her reply was "I hurt everywhere, all the time ...my neck, my arms, my shins, my hips, my toes... the doctors won't give me anything strong enough to relieve my pain." "It could reasonably have been said for the last decade that I could die soon!" "I wouldn't make the doctor be responsible. All they would have to do is let me buy something at the drugstore and I'd take care of the suicide."

The conversation ended with her pleading to be told what she could take to end her life. As a former health practitioner, I reminded her once again that I would not jeopardize my own future to help her find the quick and timely death she seeks. Yet, she probably is as entitled as those who will be covered by the proposed law to choose how and when she'll die.

I wish you and our other legislators wisdom, compassion and fortitude in making a decision worthy of my mother-in-law's brave struggle with her aging body and desire to die.

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