

Clerk

Physician-Assisted Dying Committee

House of Commons, Parliament

Ottawa, ON

K0A 1A0

Dear Members of the Committee;

I have been tracking the news and following the discussion on Physician Assisted Dying.

I am 15 years old. I am also the youngest person (at that time 10 years old) to have spoken to a Parliamentary Committee (November 2010 – when I addressed the issue of bullying and abuse of power issues for children in classrooms).

I understand the question you are studying is not whether we should proceed as a society in physician assisted death, but “how”? I understand that politicians are seeking to gain input on how to legally implement the wilful killing of another human being. I understand that during an election the adults were talking about legislation with an age cap and that others were saying it should include children as young as 12. Now I understand that some are saying there should be no age limit. So the question is, as humanely as possible with the least amount of threat to human dignity, how can we allow children and youth to kill themselves legally? At least, as a 15 year old listening to the adults discuss this issue, that is how it is being “heard.” I want to make this submission because I haven’t seen one minor speak to this legislation and yet it stands to affect every single child or youth in my nation! A youth has to say something here and so be it, if it is me!

I will honor the question of how but from the vantage point of being a youth asking the question of how.

☐ How can a society introduce legislation without letting the children or youth come to the

political table? Where are the youth here? Our how is not the same as the adults: our how is how can the adults continually and legally get away with more and more decision making without the kids directly having a voice? Aren't kids supposed to be getting healthy families, communities, education from the adults? Why isn't there a committee studying this question first?

☒ How can a society introduce legislation without providing the basics of care for all children and youth in this "special" time in their childhoods? Even the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child says we must give special care to children and youth in this precious time called a childhood. This decision to open up assisted death to children and youth runs in the opposite direction of how children and youth hold onto this document as some form of rights to protection and care among the adults in their midst.

☒ I am a youth. I am constantly coming into contact with youth who are healthy (outwardly normal) but struggling. I am not a struggling youth but I sure do find myself more and more consoling, intervening or referring them to adults to get help. How can I do this, if the adults are thinking about telling them to consider suicide? This is nuts! Some have diagnosable conditions or are on meds and some aren't but have some really messed up social and family contexts: parents and leaders too hurried and hurtful to notice them. Now they are willing to notice them but to offer them death? They are here in your own backyards. They are among yourselves as professionals and from so-called "good" communities and families. Just when the issue of children and youth's mental health is finally coming to the spotlight among the adults (great!), the adults throw in the idea for a quick fix – for them! The issue of how isn't the same for the children or youth looking at this issue. We have noticed that the adults however, do not like to think that all the work of the adults (our institutions such as education, medicine, or our House of Commons) is failing to care for children and youth and yet this is happening. But this too is not new

news for the adults because the Senate of Canada already pointed this fact out years ago.

“The Silenced Citizens: Effective Implementation Of Canada’s International Obligations With Respect To The Rights Of Children - Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights “ (The Honourable Raynell Andreychuk, Chair; The Honourable Joan Fraser, Deputy Chair - April 2007). While the focus might have been international, Canada must learn in humility of it’s own failings too.

☐ How can legalizing assisted death assist children and youth who are already inundated with messages about how disposable they are. Can this really be part of a healthy vision for a nation? Just a walk around a town, a city, or via social media and the messages are clear: children and youth are disposable and manufacturable (pliable, not yet fully formed, unreasonable thus manipulatable human beings). This is especially if they do not conform to becoming good little consumers and especially if they have no alternative community or counter-cultural “space” in which to find healthy narratives and close connections to real people who have time and attention for them. Children and youth do not need to be told how disposable they are because they already are soaked in this message and trying to dodge it. If there is that one common theme I hear over and over again it’s that. Suicide isn’t a strange opt out plan for them – it is just the logical conclusion of the messages they live. They avoid adults because adults tend to blame the kids, but if adult now can give them a quick fix, they will turn to adults to do the job for them. Children and youth do not need to be seeded with the idea that they can finish the job off in a way that makes it all neat and tidy for the adults but that is what the adults are now discussing. How selfish! Children and youth don’t want suicide, but they do want to go to sleep with an option that would have them wake up without the pain and blame they are living. They want communities of care, compassion, hope, belonging, empowerment and a tender worldview in their deepest and darkest moments and challenges, healthy

guidance and I am not talking about a child or youth dying of cancer with no hope of a treatment or cure either. I am talking about children and youth and their struggles in dysfunctional, toxic and even poisonous settings where they are expected to “thrive in.” They are off-loaded and exhausted. Children and youth are looking for their ruby shoes, not a needle from the Wizard of Oz. This cannot be how the adults decide to deal with the issues involved in the “birth lottery.”

☐ So “how” can this be, especially as we are trying to be a nation that is seeking to reconcile itself to the mistakes of its own history (devaluing some children and youth in residential schools) and at the same time, create a future dedicated to not doing the same mistakes all over again (by valuing all children and youth)? Physician Assisted Dying plans seem more like a plan to rid governments of financial and social “burdens” (struggling children and youth are more expensive than those who aren’t struggling) or a new form of population culling: won’t those who are the most vulnerable already be the ones most susceptible to this? E.g. aboriginal children? those on the streets? How about kids in foster care who are already told they supposedly have something wrong with them? Children and youth always pay the price to bad legislation and to say it’s a choice and one choice put on our backs to carry is not fair for us as a group and it is wrong. It just sends the wrong message at the recess yards, in cafeterias and among adults who can be so mean to kids who aren’t theirs own already. Kids already fear doctors, I can only imagine now they would have one good reason. How can parents explain this one to a child? They can’t trick a kid and rationalize it away.

☐ Our new Prime Minister says he is the Minister of Youth and he won the birth lottery. I am hoping that when he reads committee reports that he “sees” and “hears” the children and youth. Maybe he will ask questions like: what impact will this have on the kids? For their good or not? What big social message are we sending to them? Instead of questions about

how to make government services like death accessible, make the ingredients of life accessible. I am hoping the Prime Minister and the people of this Committee see and hear at least one youth because we were included in these reports and because we were honest and speaking truth to power in the best way we can: defending all human dignity – even the little people in this special place called childhood! Children and youth want better! I am opposed to Physician-Assisted Death – it sends the wrong message. It sends an even worse message to the children and the youth.

Respectfully,

Lauren Clemenger