

November 6, 2020

To: The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Re: Bill C-7

To whom it may concern,

As we honour our veterans during this month of November, I would like to share my reflections on the proposed amendments to the Criminal Code regarding assisted suicide. Recently, I was privileged to walk with a former member of the Canadian Armed Forces in his final days. An active, vital human being with a keen wit and a sense of humour, he was reduced to a life of chronic pain and spent his last years in a wheelchair. This man was a fighter, and more than that, he was possessed of a strong faith, a clear belief in the value of human suffering, and a spirit of determination. He did not allow his limitations, or the pain he endured, to let him lose faith in the value of life. When he finally was placed in palliative care, I witnessed the love and compassion of a family that did their utmost to comfort and ease his pain in every way possible. As his wife said, "Assisted suicide is not an option. We will make him as comfortable as possible, and let him go when he's ready." What I witnessed was compassionate, quality palliative care. I saw physicians helping family members to make informed decisions, through the exercise of reasonable protocols. The need to alleviate pain was balanced with respect for the value of life. At no point did human hands intervene to bring about death.

When assisted suicide was first legalized, we were promised safeguards to ensure that a moral "slippery slope" did not occur. Despite examples in numerous other countries, where legal safeguards were struck down one by one, MAiD went ahead with the assurance that it would never happen here. Now, many of those safeguards are at risk of being dismantled. C-7 poses a threat to elderly and disabled patients like my friend, who, instead of being treated by authentic palliative care, may be euthanized at the whim of a doctor or family member, with little or no protection in place. Lethally injecting a person not capable of consenting is contrary to their Charter right to "life, liberty and the security of the person".

Meanwhile, euthanizing a person not deemed to be terminally ill is a grave overreach. Further, while the proposed 90-day waiting period for persons deemed non-terminal may sound like a secure safeguard, it is very likely that a future court decision could strike down the requirement.

We are already very far down the "slippery slope", and Bill C-7 intends to take us down even farther.

All human beings have inherent dignity. Ending suffering by ending a life runs profoundly contrary to that dignity. Having seen good palliative care in action, I question whether legalized assisted suicide was ever necessary in the first place. If our medical system is capable of making a suffering patient comfortable in their last days, why has killing them become so necessary? And why do we need to create more situations in which it is deemed permissible to kill?

Sincerely,

Benjamin O'Brien