

Admin, LACO

Subject: FW: Choice Submission

From: Johannes Herrmann

Sent: Tuesday, 10 October 2017 7:28 AM

To: Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices <eolcc@parliament.wa.gov.au>

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Hi there.

I feel strongly that people who are of sound mind should, with appropriate checks and balances, be able to make an informed decision on when and how to end their life, in order to avoid an undignified and/or painful death that can be extremely lengthy.

I have had two gentlemen that I know commit suicide as a respite from a lengthy and painful death. In both cases, I'm glad that they had the inner strength to be able to make the decisions for themselves, but am very saddened by the fact that they were forced to a lonely suicide rather than dying with dignity, surrounded by friends and family.

I have also witnessed family members die in much more discomfort than needed. In one case a medical practitioner realised that the legal amounts of pain killer were no longer sufficient to stop the agony of one relative and, after consulting with us, increased the dosage to where my relative passed away without pain and in their sleep. What this professional did was, theoretically, a crime. It was entirely ethical and very compassionate and I am extremely grateful for their actions.

I am aware of several reasons raised against the right to die with dignity. I would like to address the main ones.

There is a religious argument, which is pertinent to those who make it but irrelevant to Australian law. We are not a country founded on any one or several religions and ethics should shape laws, not belief. There are also arguments based on ethics - because different people do disagree on ethical behaviour. In the end, there is some case to be made for certain medical professionals not feeling able to assist their patients with this choice, and I respect that. In such cases, the professional should be required to refer their patient to a practitioner who does feel able to do so. While we should respect a practitioner's personal right to not take part in something that they are uncomfortable with, they should respect the rights of others in a similar manner.

There is also the 'slippery slope' argument, which is generally recognised in logic as the argument of someone who doesn't have the ability to argue rationally. A government cannot restrict the options of future governments to make policy or regulatory decisions, so saying that legislating for X now could cause Y in the future makes no sense. The burden of proof would be on those who use this argument to prove the connection between X and Y.

Finally, there are arguments that any legislation could be abused. This is a valid argument, but sadly misses the point. Any legislation can be abused, and loopholes left by lack of legislation can also be abused. I have known people whose relatives have tricked them into signing documents giving them the power of attorney, which has resulted in financial hardship and emotional distress. It is indeed important that any legislation in the end-of-life area have strong safeguards. For example, having such a choice delaying the paying out of the estate by several years would address the fears that elderly people will be bullied into agreeing to suicide by their children wanting to inherit sooner.

I hope that you take this submission into consideration.

Hannes

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