

Mrs. Susan Regnard,

23/09/2017

The Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices,  
Level 1,  
11 Harvest Terrace,  
West Perth WA 6005.



Dear Sirs,

**SUBMISSION**  
**to the WA Parliament's**  
**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES**

I would like to make a submission under your Terms of Reference point 3, to "consider what type of legislative change may be required."

**GRIEF AND DEPRESSION**

I would suggest that it is important to carefully avoid any change to the current legislation that would place vulnerable people in danger of losing their lives to treatable depression or grief. I would suggest this is bad public policy for several reasons:

1. It is a grave injustice to the person
2. It deprives families of valuable and valued family members
3. It deprives individuals, families and society at large of the opportunity and means of developing the pro-social character and attitudes which underpin the best features and values of western culture – the fundamental concept of individual rights, the protection of the most vulnerable and the humane treatment of all society's members.

**Point 1: It is a grave injustice to the person**

My 98 year old mother-in-law has lived with us for the last 12 years. In the year 1998 one of her sons died tragically. She was devastated and grief-stricken. It seemed like an unbearable suffering, and she wanted to take her own life.

She has come to accept her son's death. Since he passed away, she has celebrated weddings, Christmases, and birthdays with us. She has had the joy of seeing 11 great-grandchildren come into the world, and is looking forward to 3 more in the next few months. Her life has been rich and rewarding, despite her loss. She has suffered setbacks - two bouts of pneumonia, two falls resulting in a cracked femur and a broken pelvis - and has fought back with courage and determination to the point where she can walk again. Her spirit is as alive as it ever was. She contributes spiritually and emotionally to the richness, diversity and wellbeing of the extended family.

She is happy to be alive and see her family grow, and they love her. To allow to her to end my own life in a time of suffering would have deprived her of many years of happy, productive living. That is not love, or care, or compassion, or justice. That is indifference, cruelty and neglect. The law should not facilitate indifference, cruelty and neglect.

**Point 2: It deprives families of valuable and valued family members**

My children and their cousins have grown up with a grandmother. Because she is around to tell her stories, they have heard her stories of her own mother and father, the joys and hardships of childhood poverty and privation, growing up in a different era and culture, and the indelible imprint of a loving home and family life. She has been a good influence and a source of wisdom and encouragement to her family, and an inspiration to many. Had the law allowed, or implicitly encouraged, her to take her own life, my children's sense of identity and connection with the past would have been much curtailed, and they would not have had the example of courage and perseverance in the face of suffering that they have had. Citizens with this sense of connection and stability provide the foundations on which we, as a nation, build a stable future for all of us.

**Point 3: It deprives people of the opportunity to develop pro-social characteristics, values and attitudes**

No-one learns to play the violin, or tennis, by reading books or hearing descriptions of how to play – we learn through practice. No-one learns to do maths or write letters or say please and thank-you without practice. In the same way, we learn kindness, consideration and compassion through practice. If the law had led my mother-in-law to the “easy way out” of her grief, we would all be deprived of the opportunity to develop the qualities, values and attitudes we need so much to cultivate, in order to function well as a community. Little daily exercises, like leaving a few extra minutes to get somewhere, putting the wheelchair in the boot or making a cup of tea, change us profoundly, and we need this. As a society, we can't expect our children to grow up compassionate and thoughtful if we – tacitly or vocally – encourage the old, the sick or the grieving to get out of our way. What would Australia be like without the mateship and compassion which is so much a part of our collective self-image? And how will mateship develop, without practice? Australia can't afford to enshrine the selfishness of what I once heard described as the “toilet mentality” of flushing old age, sickness or disability down the drain, without flushing away the opportunities for personal and emotional growth that they give us.

In the light of these three points, I recommend to the Committee that all protections against assisted suicide be retained, for the protection of vulnerable people.

**RESPECT FOR THE LAW AND FOR GOVERNMENT**

A second matter that I would ask the Committee to consider very seriously is the question of bringing the law – not just this law, but the law as a whole, and the administration with it – into contempt. I read that the proposed legislation in NSW includes the provision that “euthanasia” is not to be recorded as the cause of death on the death certificate. This amounts to directing doctors to lie on the death certificate. How does the State expect its citizens to trust or respect a system of administration that makes lying mandatory? If we know the State is prepared to lie about one thing, why not anything and everything? Do citizens not deserve to be able to expect official records to reflect the truth? And how can the State, which demands that doctors lie to the families of patients and the body of citizens as a whole, then demand or expect that citizens tell the truth about their taxes or whether they drive within the speed limit? This is an appalling piece of public policy and will undermine respect for the law. We cannot afford to do this.

Yours Sincerely,

Susan Regnard