

Elaine Buchan

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The Principal Research Officer
Select Committee on End of Life Choices
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

End of Life Choice - Giving control to those who are terminally ill

Dear Sir/Madam

I am lodging my submission in favour of the End of Life Choice. My thoughts are very strong on the subject, having lost my own father 10 years ago. His long suffering was painful to watch as he withered away in Palliative care for months. The effect on my mother, sisters and brothers was heart wrenching. As my husband and I were working overseas at the time, it meant leaving my father not knowing if we would be seeing him again. As he lingered for so long, I returned to the hospital twice afterwards, flying from the middle east both times. Even though he made his own prior decision to not be resuscitated should the need arise, the pain of seeing him slowly deteriorate to a birdlike form crushed us all. It was a totally undignified ending for him and a lasting picture of our father which was seared into each of our memories.

When California, USA was going through a similar process in 2015, a terminally ill young woman Ms Brittany Maynard made her own submission to the Californian Legislative Council. A passionate plea before her death by assisted suicide later that same year.

California law prevented her from getting the end of life option she deserved so she felt she had no option but to move to another state (Oregon) to help facilitate her passing.

Below is her own story. Please take the time to read her plea.

“No one should have to leave their home and community for peace of mind, to escape suffering and to plan for a gentle death. For the vast majority of people that is not even a remote possibility. The cost of moving, the inconvenience to family and the time it takes to change residency status, finding new doctors, confirm eligibility and obtain medication. This must change.

We have a right to a choice, which does not include leaving, home family and friends.

Although I know I am dying I refuse to lose dignity, and subject my family to purposeless and senseless prolonged pain and suffering.

We need an aid in dying, giving mentally competent terminally ill and dying an option to request life ending medication they can chose to ingest if the pain and suffering is unbearable.

Making aided dying a crime imposes undue hardships and suffering for many people who are terminally ill and suffering tremendously. It limits our options and deprives us of our ability to control how much pain and agony we endure before we pass.

Palliative care as an alternative, drugging the patient into a coma. Nutrition and fluids withheld until the person dies from disease or dehydration. No-one can tell when that would happen as each patient is different. We deserve the autonomy and freedom to make this most personal choice for ourselves. I cannot imagine what that experience would be like, I may be minimally conscious still suffering and unable to move or speak. That terrifies me. Death with dignity is a much swifter and peaceful way to pass and logic motivates me to choose this for myself.

Paleo devastation usually requires hospitalisation, I want to make sure my husband and family are with me when I die. I want to leave this earth in my home in the arms of my husband and my parents.

I cannot change the fact I am dying but I am living my dying days to the fullest. I am preparing to experience the best possible death achieving some control over my passing is very important to me. Knowing I can leave this life with dignity allows me to focus on living. It has provided me enormous peace of mind.

The inevitability of death is universal. The widespread support and overwhelmingly positive response to my story represents our community is ready to have a new conversation about death. The decision about how I end my dying process should be up to me and my family under a doctor’s care. How dare the government make decision or limit options for terminally ill people like me.

Every one of us must die. We should not have to suffer excruciating pain, shame or a prolonged dying process.

The laws in California and forty-five states must change to prevent prolonged involuntary suffering for all terminally ill. As elected officials you have the power to make this happen. Please take action. Every terminally ill person deserves the choice to die with dignity. Let the movement begin here. Now. Access to this choice lies in your hands. Freedom from pain and suffering is a most basic human right.

Please, make death with dignity a healthcare choice.”

Brittany’s heartfelt video can be viewed online and a fund has been created “The Brittany Maynard Fund” in conjunction with the oldest and largest organisation working to improve care and expand choices at the end of life “Compassion & Choices”.

If it comes to the time of my own decision I know I do not want my own children, husband or family to suffer un-necessarily at my expense. I'd like to have a dignified passing.

It is true that if an animal is suffering and about to die, we as humans feel the need to put that animal out of its pain and suffering. Why can't we do that for ourselves? What is the difference? Particularly if it is a last wish of the patient.

In closing, how aptly Ms Maynard puts it:

"As elected officials you have the power to make this happen. Please take action."

Now Australians have finally got to the stage of seriously discussing this most important topic, let us make it count.

Let the movement begin here. Now. In Western Australia. Let us be the pioneers in our own country, show the rest of Australia that we are serious about our population and their mental welfare to the very end of life. Allow us to be humane.

Thank you for reading my submission,

Most sincerely

Elaine Emily Buchan