

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY – JENNIFER CALLENDER, RN DENVER HEALTH MEDICAL CENTER**

My name is Jennifer Callender and I am a registered nurse at Denver Health Medical Center. I am writing to oppose the Physician Assisted Suicide bill being sponsored in the House of Representatives, Bill #15-1135 titled the Colorado Death with Dignity Act.

Although I oppose this bill as a professional nurse, it is also more personal. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1988 and although it went into remission, it re-emerged in her lower spine and pelvis in 1997. She fought her cancer until 2003 when it had spread to most of her body and her oncologist said that although she could continue chemotherapy, it would just postpone the inevitable. She was terminally ill and was dying.

She was very sick and in the hospital for about a month and one afternoon as I was sitting with her, she told me she was ready to go home. Her exact words were "I am ready to go home home." She meant she was ready to die and find rest with the Lord in heaven. We arranged for Hospice care and took her back to her home in Woodland Park.

To watch my mom suffer in the final months of her illness and especially for the weeks she was at home under the care of Hospice, was very painful; not only for me but for my dad and sister as well. She was receiving nourishment and hydration through IV's, had a catheter in her bladder, was receiving morphine for pain, and although she had periods of lucidity in the first weeks, she eventually slipped into a coma. Although the suffering was intense for us and her life no longer had meaning in the secular sense, it was a beautiful period of time for our family. Had she chosen physician assisted suicide she would have robbed my dad, sister, and myself of the opportunity to care for and be with her in those last weeks. To look back and remember that we helped bathe her, turn her to prevent bed sores, provide pain medication, and just sit with her is so comforting and healing. We would not have had those opportunities or memories if she had chosen to end her own life. Her suffering, and ours, joined the suffering of Christ on the Cross. Christ gave everything he had for us and now we were giving everything we could for our wife and mother; and she was allowing us to provide that gift to her.

Physician assisted suicide is being presented to Colorado as just another choice on a menu of palliative care for those who are terminally ill. Unfortunately this so called choice will eventually eliminate choices for those who do not agree with this stance. Physician assisted suicide has been legal for many years in Oregon. Since then the funding and resources for those who would choose Hospice care for their final time has been stretched very thin. Medicare reimburses much less for Hospice care now than it did before this law was enacted. It's simply less expensive to provide a prescription for a bottle of life ending medication.

Not only does this bill reduce real choice, it will eventually spread to other members of society, not just the terminally ill. When abortion was first legalized, it was supposed to be rare; limited to the exceptions of rape, incest, or the determination a child would not survive long outside the womb. Now, 40 years later there are states that allow abortion up to the time of birth and there are doctors who will abort a healthy baby who is ready to be born, in fact we have one such doctor here in Colorado. If the Physician Assisted Suicide law is passed, the same thing will happen. It will spread from the voluntary suicide of the elderly who are terminally ill to the involuntary suicide of the physically handicapped, mentally disabled, or those whose care is too costly for insurance companies or Medicaid/Medicare.

Human beings have dignity because we are made in the image and likeness of God- it does not come from our usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty, health or lack thereof. It is because of that dignity that we must protect life from conception to natural death. Families deserve the opportunity to care for their disabled or dying loved ones even though it is tiring, heartbreaking, and sometimes seems to have no point. Suffering is a part of life. Great graces come through suffering. For my family those included a closer bond between my dad, my sister, and myself; a growing dependence on God; a greater recognition of the importance of faith, family, and friends; and the opportunity to care for my mother as she had cared for me growing up.