

Testimony in Opposition to HB 1135

Presented before the Colorado House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee Public Hearing

Friday, February 6, 2015

Good day Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee. Thank you very much for allowing me to offer my thoughts to you today.

My name is Anita Cameron. I am 49 years old and I live here in Denver. I am a person with multiple disabilities, two of which are degenerative, and one which will take my life. I am here on behalf of Not Dead Yet and ADAPT, two national disability rights organizations, to speak out against HB 1135. I will not use the euphemisms that have been chosen for the name of this bill, but will refer to it by exactly what it is - physician assisted suicide. It is very important to be up front, clear and honest about what this is. Couching it in pretty language and hiding the truth is disingenuous at best, and dangerous, at worst.

I am not against people who want to commit suicide. I am against a system that says if you are non-disabled and feel suicidal, you will get help to live whether you want it or not, while if you are disabled or sick and want to die, you will be seen as brave and helped to die. This assisted suicide bill is discriminatory because certain people with certain disabilities and illnesses will get suicide prevention, while others will be "encouraged", or even coerced to kill themselves.

Contrary to popular belief, fear of pain is not the main reason that terminally ill people want to die. Oregon doctors say the main reasons they've been issuing prescriptions for lethal drugs are loss of autonomy (89.9%), less able to engage in activities (87.4%), loss of dignity (83.8%), loss of control of bodily functions (58.7%) and feelings of being a burden (38.3%). These are all disability related issues and concerns.

Unscrupulous family members, caregivers and heirs who would coerce those with prescriptions to fill and take them is only one of the pitfalls of this bill. There is no oversight and no witnesses required at the time of death to say if the medication was taken voluntarily.

Doctors would be the gatekeepers of people's lives, and can decide for you about your quality of life. Further, doctors often make mistakes about whether a person is terminal or not. In June, 2009, while living in Washington state, my mother was determined to be in the final stages of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and placed in hospice. Two months later, I was told that her body had begun the process of dying. My mother wanted to come home to Colorado to die, so the arrangements were made. A funny thing happened, though. Once she got here, her health began to improve! Almost six years later, she is still alive and reasonably active.

There are many other reasons why I am against this assisted suicide bill, but an important one, for me, is culture. As a Black Latina, I could never wrap my head around the assisted suicide phenomenon. I thought that it was some odd thing that privileged White people were into. My thoughts were

confirmed when I learned that the Pew Research Center recently found that while 54% of Whites supported assisted suicide, 65% of Blacks and Latinos opposed it.

My final reason for opposing this assisted suicide bill is that people already have the right to die. Treatment and nutrition can be refused. A person can find ways to kill him or herself without involving doctors and the law. People can kill themselves without changing the health care system that all of us depend on, and without putting my rights and my life, or those I care about in jeopardy. I want to live!

Thank you for your attention.

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