

My name is Bill Bolthouse and I have been a family physician in Colorado since 1991. I helped organize and expand the work of the Summit Community Care clinic in Frisco and I currently work at the Inner City Health Center here in Denver, helping the poor and uninsured with their health needs.

While my heart goes out to those proponents of the bill who have suffered with their loved ones through the agony of terminal illness, I wanted to come here today to speak my opposition to this bill as it has been proposed to be a solution to the problem. In fact, I believe this bill to be bad for physicians, dangerous for patients and destructive to our society.

We have heard how this bill erodes the trust that I work very hard to build into every patient relationship. It is because my patients trust me to use everything at my disposal to help them and not to harm, that we can have frank conversations about their most intimate issues. And because of 2500 years of Hippocratic tradition, they know they can even tell me that they feel worthless, unloved, hopeless and that they want to die and that I will listen and then heal, help and give hope. I look at this bill as an unwelcome intrusion into my profession. It will undermine all doctor-patient relationships, regardless who chooses to prescribe suicide drugs and further relegate physicians into the lesser role of "health care provider", as if we were merely technicians.

This bill is dangerous for patients as the "right to die" will subtly over time become the duty to die. I have an older patient whose son kicked her out of his house to live in a car. The problem of elder abuse is widespread and it is hidden. The so-called safe guards in this bill are not enough to prevent the overt and covert discrimination against the weakest in our society: the elderly, the disabled and the chronically ill.

Finally, this bill is detrimental to our society, because we are judged as a society on how we respond to the needs of the weakest among us. I am not only a doctor but also a rancher. I spend a lot of time and money mending fences around my ranch as they are continually assaulted by forces natural and otherwise. In this debate, the fences are the ethical boundaries we have erected over the centuries, and especially in the latest decades as medical technology continues to advance. This bill opens a breach in those fences into a vast ethical wasteland that says "not every life is worth living". While some say that statement honors the principle of autonomy, it does so at great cost. The cost can be summed up in the word expedience. Physician prescribed suicide is expedient: it is quick and it is cheap. Do we want a society where the hard work of caring for the dying is tempted by what is expedient? Please consider that and say "no" to this bill.

Please call or email me for more information or comments. This is my personal number.

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