



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT

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Submission Cover Sheet

End of Life Choices in the ACT

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From: Meraiah Foley
To: [LA Committee - EOLC](#)
Subject: Submission regarding End of Life Choices
Date: Monday, 5 February 2018 10:21:50 AM

To Whom it may Concern:

I am writing to express my support for the enactment of Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation in the ACT. I am currently a resident of Braidwood, NSW but I work in the ACT and receive most of my medical care in the ACT. There is a high likelihood that I will retire in the ACT, and may face these crucial decisions your jurisdiction.

I would like to share with you my own personal experience of Voluntary Assisted Dying. In February 2016, my beloved aunt Kate was diagnosed with Stage 4 pancreatic cancer. She was an extremely active woman, a downhill skier into her late 60s and a mountaineer who always maintained a healthy lifestyle. By the end of March 2016, my aunt was in excruciating pain, unable to comfortably walk or sleep. It was clear that she had only weeks to live.

A resident of Washington state, in the United States, my aunt had legal access to Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) provisions, and chose to avail herself of that option. The safeguards were very effective. In addition to finding a doctor who was willing to attest to her terminal condition my aunt had to undertake several meetings with social workers to determine her mental fitness, and had to reiterate her wishes to access VAD on three separate occasions before the prescription drugs could be issued. We saw her resolve as an incredible act of bravery, and I know it gave her a sense of power and control in the face of a situation where all power and control had been stripped from her. On April 16, when she was still strong enough to get out of bed, she had breakfast with her family, shared laughter and stories. She died at 11am that morning, exactly as she had planned, with her family around her. She said goodbye, drank the medication, and was gone. No prolonged pain or suffering. No loss of dignity. It was exactly the death she wanted.

I know of other friends whose parents, facing down similar diagnoses, have availed themselves of the medication, and chosen not to take it. All of them felt great relief in knowing THEY had the power to end their own suffering, if the time was right.

If you are in doubt, I strongly urge you to watch the documentary "How to Die in Oregon" for a living exemplar of how VAD plays out.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_F-525sCzhE

Oregon state has 19 years of successful VAD experience, with strong safeguards and detailed reporting. Contrary to the arguments of many religious leaders, there has been no 'slippery' slope of access. Numbers of people who access the medication remain relatively low (204 people in 2016) and just over half of those people actually use the medication because, as it turns out, the will to live is very strong for many people.

You can read the reports of how VAD is implemented in Oregon here:

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/ProviderPartnerResources/EvaluationResearch/DeathwithDignityAct/Documents/year19.pdf>

I thank you for your time, and strongly urge you to follow Victoria's lead and pass Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation in the ACT.

Sincerely,

Meraiah Foley

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Dr. Meraiah Foley
UNSW Canberra

