



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT**

Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA,  
Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA.

## Submission Cover Sheet

### End of Life Choices in the ACT

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# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## Australian Catholic Disability Council

The Secretary  
Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT  
Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
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22 March, 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Submission to the Inquiry into End of Life Choices in the ACT**

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Disability Council (ACDC) and as Chair, I would like to raise an element of the vexatious debate on euthanasia and the right to die.

Currently the debate focuses on palliative care and people who have terminal illness. The ACDC wishes to state strongly that the euthanasia issue is much broader and far more dangerous than is being portrayed by the media and generally sold to the general public.

The debate is very much applicable to people with disability of all ages. There is evidence in all sectors of society that it consciously and subconsciously believes the quality of life of people with disability is not worth protecting. This is especially relevant as reports of the care and support for people with disability is judged to be seen as too high and unsustainable.

The ACDC is made up of people with disability and with one voice we would like to express our concerns about euthanasia.

As a people with disability, we have experienced this very attitude on many occasions. It has raised very difficult emotional and psychological issues for us to contend with. Some of the questions we have been forced to face are:

- Do I have a duty to die, for the sake of family and society, to cease to be a 'burden'?
- What is my worth and value to society?
- Am I a 'drain' on what is considered the welfare system, even though I am fully employed and pay 'my own way'?

- When do I consider my 'used by date' is up? Do I have a say?
- Will others decree when it is my 'turn' to die? Where and when will I die?
- When do I have the right to choose to die or not to die, but to live?

The pressure weighs heavily on individuals, like us, who feel forced to consider these questions.

History has taught us that when euthanasia and eugenics become entwined, people who are perceived by society as unwanted, unacceptable, different or a financial burden on society are the most vulnerable. This negative attitude dehumanises and desensitises the rest of the population and, as a result, euthanasia becomes an act of kindness and mercy; to dispose of such 'suffering' rather than to nurture the life that exists. It is then that the practice of 'mercy killing' becomes acceptable and perceived as normal practice. In fact, there is a real danger that it will become law. Indeed, we have seen this reality in action in our own lifetimes.

It is not the right of any person to decree that an individual, with or without disability, must end their life.

Why is it that acknowledgement of peoples' contribution, talents and the right to 'just be' is rarely seen, acknowledged or protected as a social justice and human rights matter?

As people of faith, we are *outraged*, *outspoken* and *out* 'there' towards those who are vulnerable and voiceless. We need to take action to turn the tide of negativity and dangerous half-truths.

It is vital that the dignity and right of every human person is upheld and respected from the beginning of life to its natural end.

Yours sincerely,

Sr Myree Harris RSJ OAM

Chair

Australian Catholic Disability Council

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR PASTORAL LIFE

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