



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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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The Committee Secretary
Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020, Canberra ACT 2601

To The Committee Secretary

I am writing this to express my views on the topic of End of Life Choices for ACT residents.

By way of background, I am a veterinarian with more than ten years experience in small animal practice. I am the daughter of a nurse who spent many years working caring for terminal cancer patients. And I am a person who has lost numerous loved ones as a result of various types of cancers.

Please find below my comments in relation to the terms of reference:

1. I do not believe that the current medical practices go far enough to assist and permit a person to exercise their preference in managing the end of their life where the individual is suffering as a result of an incurable and terminal disease. There are many situations especially in terminal cases, where no amount of medication or palliative care can make a person comfortable. Our current laws do not allow an individual to take their their own life. As a result, in instances where suffering is not being adequately managed, individuals are only left with the following options:
 - Dying in pain and suffering.
 - Attempting to take their own lives. In this case the means by which this is achieved is likely to have variable results, and maybe incredibly unpleasant. The individual is also likely to die alone as they will generally not want to involve their loved ones due to possible legal implications.
2. I am in full support of voluntary assisted dying being made legal in the ACT. I think it should be the right of every person to be able to access voluntary assisted dying, if they wish. The majority of my friends and family in the ACT seem to share this view.
3. I consider the following to be potential risks:
 - Without clear, short time frames included in the legislation for the application/review process there is the possibility that the bureaucratic process could take so long that individuals are left suffering for long periods of time or may die before they are able to access assisted dying. Clear, short time frames should be incorporated into any legislation to ensure that the scheme is able to achieve its intention.
 - If doctors are allowed to conscientiously object to voluntary assisted dying there may be the risk of inadequate numbers of medical practitioners to perform all of the functions to enable the voluntary assisted dying to be accessed within meaningful time frames.
 - How will this scheme be funded and how will the cost be determined.? There is a risk that any excessive costs will make this scheme financially unavailable for those individuals who want to access it.
4. I think that the Victorian scheme appears to be a good model to base an ACT scheme on. However, as noted in my response to TOR 3, clear, short time frames should be incorporated into legislation. This is particularly important where a person has had a self-administration permit approved and they have become unable to self administer, requiring them to re-apply for a practitioner-administration permit.
5. It should be a priority of the ACT Government to remove the Andrew's Bill preventing the territories from having the same rights as the states to make their own decisions and legislation on legalised euthanasia.
6. I would like to add that as a veterinarian I find it particularly horrendous that we leave

humans to die in the kind of pain and suffering that would be considered inexcusable and cruel for any animal to experience. I have performed many many euthanasias during my time as veterinarian and I can give the following insight due to my experience:

- Many Canberran pet owners, at the time of euthanasia for their pets, have expressed to me how they cannot believe we are not as kind to humans to allow euthanasia.
- Performed properly, euthanasias are generally peaceful and very quick, allowing the patient to pass away quietly and calmly surrounded by loved ones.
- During the Victoria debate, I heard in the media an argument against voluntary assisted dying that doctors would not be able to perform their job of healing patients properly if they are also assisting patients in dying. As a veterinarian, my commitment to treating and healing my patients is in no way compromised by the fact that I am also able to provide euthanasia as an option to pet owners when appropriate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this important issue.

Kind Regards

Dr Siobhan Gibbons

[REDACTED]

Giralang ACT 2617

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