



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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Dear Secretary,

Facing the death of a loved one is a daunting experience, especially if the loved one is in pain. It is natural to wish for removal of that pain, but how many people so concerned would themselves be prepared to actually take the life of their loved one?

"They" (i.e. somebody else) should do it, should provide the service.

Very few of us would be prepared to kill a family pet suffering pain, but would ask a vet to kill it if it was deemed necessary. How can we expect someone to actually kill a loved person?

Palliative care can kill the pain and allow the loved one to die peacefully and graciously.

A former Governor-General once stated that once a person ceased to be productive, he/she should be a candidate for euthanasia. I believe he now would not subscribe to that idea, but he obviously reflected the opinion of some people in our society.

It is well-known that so-called safeguards included in such places as Belgium, Holland and Oregon have been diminished by pressure to extend the parameters within which euthanasia may be undertaken; and we now face pressure in some places to extend access to euthanasia to anyone whose desire to live is diminished by unfortunate experience, regardless of age.

Succumbing to such demands would obviously lessen the sense of responsibility that society overall should have for its most vulnerable citizens.

Some have already suggested that euthanasia of handicapped newborns should be permitted. No one would deny that the presence of a handicapped child in a family presents challenges, emotional and financial to the family and financial to the community.

An accident that results in permanent disability also presents serious challenges.

Would anyone yet suggest that permanent disability should make euthanasia a practical option for a family or the community?

Coping with disability brings out the best in families and the community.

The love and acceptance of a disabled child in so many families highlights the true heights that can be reached by we humans. Those who have trouble coping need to be helped by the community, which to date has shown it is compassionate to disabled or handicapped people by providing special schooling and services; and by its support for our sportsmen and women with disabilities.

A society in which children born with a disability or those people with an acquired disability are "euthanised" would currently be judged as heartless and despicable. But where would we be headed if the intended safeguards are continuously undermined as they have been in the above-mentioned jurisdictions?

People apparently dying in pain are part of our handicapped or disabled community and deserve to be treated with love. Pain can be relieved through palliation, but true love demands acceptance and patience.

If the physical pain can be relieved, most pain then experienced is by relatives and friends, but it is not physical. The community should improve its capacity to counsel friends and relatives.

Gradual acceptance of all the arguments that have been proffered for euthanasia, would save the community increasing amounts of money and if acceptance of physical or mental setbacks become less fashionable, the humanity of a community would diminish.

I believe proponents of euthanasia as currently envisioned are very sincere, and I believe hardly any of them would wish to push the guidelines for its application further than what has been passed in Victoria.

But anyone who has knowledge of politics knows that the passage of radical legislation can only be done incrementally, and inclusion of "safeguards" is standard practice. Then the chipping starts.

Please oppose any proposal to introduce the practice of euthanasia in the ACT.

Sincerely,
John McKeough

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