



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: Don Gray
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Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT

Submission from Donald Earl Gray

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My submission urges the Committee to recommend against the introduction of euthanasia under any circumstances for three reasons - that such introduction would represent the abandonment of a vital legal and moral principle; that it would bring about great suffering; and that it would come with the unsolvable problem of the "duty to die".

That members of society should not be allowed to kill one another is currently a fundamental principle of ACT law based on hitherto almost universally accepted moral values. Once a principle like this is abandoned, however good the intentions, there is in fact nowhere left to make a stand. It becomes a matter of "Personally I would draw the line here, or here, but that's just my opinion". We could vary the principle that nobody is to be punished under the law until proven guilty, at first for a very small number of people that "everyone knows" are crime bosses, but wisely we don't because we know there is no telling where it would end.

Euthanasia laws are notoriously like this, based on overseas experience. You might decide to recommend that euthanasia only be permitted for people fully able to express a choice who are very likely close to death, but immediately the lobbying would commence over the perceived "injustice" of other people - perhaps with mental impairment, or who are expected to live for a greater period - not being enabled to have their suffering ended. We are all aware of the very troubling situation in Belgium, where small children in pain are asked whether they would like to have their lives ended.

Turning to my second reason, people's beliefs and convictions are an inescapable fact which would bring about a great deal of anguish should people be given the choice of legally seeking an end to their life. Imagine having to contemplate whether to end your pain but abandon your lifelong beliefs at the very point when you are about to enter into eternity. Laws allowing euthanasia would engender fundamental disagreement, and even division, in many families already suffering greatly. The picture that pro-euthanasia advocates like to paint of a family peacefully gathered at a bedside as a loved one receives their injection and slips away would regrettably often be far from reality.

You may receive a large number of submissions from people who submit that the suffering of someone close to them could have been ended had legal euthanasia been available. It is more difficult to present examples of the mental and emotional suffering that legal euthanasia would bring about, for the simple reason that few of us have had

relevant experience in countries where euthanasia is allowed. But the suffering wouldn't be any less real, nor any less terrible, for that.

As for the "duty to die", people who are terrified by the prospect of knowing in advance that their lives will be ended at a certain time on a given day may nevertheless misguidedly feel that they must go through this for the sake of someone else. Obviously nothing at all can be done to prevent people with something to gain from, most likely, a relative's death from influencing that person's decision, possibly by cruel means, once the protection of the law is taken away.

Further, as euthanasia became established it might not be only individuals, but society as a whole, that began to bring pressure to bear. Rising medical and care costs are a severe and growing problem. Is it really difficult to foresee a day when our society begins to consider that if a person requiring a lot of care wishes to go on living then that remains their right but that they can't then expect scarce financial resources to be directed their way? Leading in effect to virtually no choice at all.

No, while I don't envy you your task, and while I'm sure it goes without saying that people on both sides of the debate would wish to prevent the suffering inherent in the course that they are supporting if they could see any possible way, I hope you will agree that on balance the most caring thing to do is to be of good courage, continue to hope, and do every mortal thing possible for each and every one of our fellow citizens while ever they maintain the health and strength to live without artificial means of support.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Don Gray