



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2023

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To the Chair of the VAD committee in the ACT Legislative Assembly, from Mrs Carole Ford

Why should a person choose to die?

We are here today to petition the ACT Government to consider adding an amendment to the ACT VAD legislation to include -
'An individual's right of choice to die with grace and dignity before the loss of mental capability removes that option'.

It's true for most of us that we want to live, especially when our lives are full and we're capable of experiencing our world and all that it offers. When we find ourselves in a dark place and have been told there will be no improvement on how we experience life then, we begin to ask '*What's the point? There's nothing left for me to live for*' This will happen to many of us as we head into old age and the slow, undignified decline into dementia or Alzheimer's takes over. Our lives become consumed by doctor's visits, numerous prescriptions, immobility, chronic pain, complete lack of energy and the will to live. We find ourselves dwelling on all the negatives that have happened recently and in our past. We feel loss, frustration, confusion, anger, self-pity, emotional and physical pain. We truly don't want to be a burden to our children or society, but this is exactly what happens.

What if we could choose to leave this Earth before all those depressing aspects of ageing catch up with us.? What if we could choose, while we were mentally capable, to never suffer in this way? Our loved ones would be shocked at first, but given the reasons they'd come to realise that having this alternative (to the harrowing disintegration that is often experienced) would be best for everyone involved.

No son or daughter wants to watch their parent decline a little more each day, until they are a faded shadow of their former selves. No son or daughter wants to see their parent slide into incoherence because they don't want to be alive anymore. Currently the ACT's VAD legislation doesn't allow people to choose to die when they wish to, with their dignity intact.

My sisters and I watched this happen to our 91-year-old father who, (after many months of sad, painful decline), spent his last two weeks hospitalised, falling over, falling out of bed at night, having nightmares, struggling to breathe, and unable to accept sustenance. He lost any connection to reality in his last days. We were united in our belief that this wasn't what he would have wanted, but assumed correctly that there wasn't another option. We are witnessing the same kind of decline in our mother, (95 this year), who has on many occasions requested that she be allowed to die while still mentally capable of choosing to.

Being able to say goodbye, while her true character and personality are still intact, is a precious gift that she and our family would be extremely grateful to receive.

Our story isn't unusual and we feel that being allowed to share it here will support our mother to facilitate her final wishes. Furthermore, amendments, such as these, may assist us all, because we may face the same issues when our time comes. Our mother is still aware of her surroundings, but her senses are fading rapidly. Macular Degeneration has taken most of her close up and middle vision and her hearing is definitely impaired. She has little feeling in her fingertips, no strength in her limbs, walking is becoming difficult and painful. These combined issues have added to her disconnected state of mind and depression. She refuses to take antidepressants and is highly allergic to opioid medication.

Thank you for listening today. We felt that making this small gesture would enable you to see that such a request is made out of love for our mother, who cannot help herself. She gave her best to our family for decades, worked full time for many years, nurtured and guided our family with care, love and pride. Since turning 90, her health has suffered significant decline. Her failing resilience is more evident every day, especially after the loss of our father in 2016. It's now beholden upon us to reciprocate the kind of love and care she gave to us in order to give her, her dying wish.