



The Catholic Women's League of Canada

MEMO

DATE: April 2, 2021

FROM: Betty Colaneri, national chairperson of legislation

TO: Parish chairpersons of legislation

CC: Parish presidents, diocesan presidents, provincial presidents and life members (on request)

One year ago, my spring memo referred to the proposed Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*. I regret this issue is not only still being addressed but expanded. It is truly surprising the government would even consider dealing with Bill C-7 during a global pandemic. The horrific conditions in long-term care facilities and the daily challenges people with disabilities face have been brought to light during the pandemic. Problems with accessibility, costs, stigma and lack of resources stand in the way of people receiving the help they need. This is what the government should focus on—offering the basic necessities and support to help people with disabling medical conditions live full and meaningful lives—not an easier way to end it. For reference, the bill can be found in its entirety at parl.ca/legisinfo.

Bill C-7 expands eligibility for medical assistance in dying (MAiD) to any competent adult who has an illness, disease or disability, is in an advanced state of decline in capability, and is experiencing intolerable and irremediable suffering, regardless of whether that person's natural death is reasonably foreseeable. The first track of this legislation is available to all Canadians equally approaching the end of life. The second track has now singled out the disability community and told them they too can end their lives.

Bill C-7 is intended to bring the law into compliance with the 2019 *Truchon v. Attorney General of Canada* ruling of the Superior Court of Quebec that struck down a provision in the law which allowed assisted dying only for those whose natural deaths are “reasonably foreseeable.”

Bill C-7 expands access to assisted dying to intolerably suffering individuals who are not approaching the end of their lives. It displaces the long-standing professional rule of the “standard of care,” which obligates physicians to apply their skills and intricate knowledge to a patient's particular clinical circumstances and replaces it with patient choice. Criteria for the bill state patients must be capable of decision-making. They must have a grievous and irremediable medical condition, which is defined as a serious illness or disability that causes “enduring and intolerable

suffering” resulting in an “advanced state of irreversible decline in capability.” There is no definition of “serious” illness or “advanced state of irreversible decline” provided, and many disabilities could fall under it. Significant loss of mobility, vision or hearing loss, for example, are disabilities that can be associated with an irreversible decline of specific capabilities and would qualify.

Bill C-7 received royal assent on March 17th, but members must continue to be vigilant in voicing their objections. Contact your members of parliament and senators with letters expressing profound disapproval of Bill C-7 in all its forms. The contact information for members of parliament and senators can be found at ourcommons.ca and sencanada.ca, respectively. Help with composing your letter and how to send it can be found at one.org. There are many articles to further inform members that can be accessed from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops website, ccb.ca. One article, in particular, is the “Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.” The Euthanasia Prevention Coalition website (epcc.ca) has a great deal of information as well.

The disappointing outcome of the bill does not change members’ beliefs and morals of how they look at the sanctity of life to its peaceful natural end. Members will continue to be the voice for the voiceless and advocate for proper resources to give hope to those who feel their situation is hopeless.

Legislation should focus on the problems of accessibility, costs, stigma, lack of resources and high palliative care that stand in the way of people getting the help they need, not on Bill C-7!

In the words of Pope Francis, “It is not enough to say we are Christians. We must live the faith not only with words, but with our actions.”

Let us put our faith into action!