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A Call to Parliamentarians from the National Disability Rights Community to Pass Bill C-14

Opening Remarks by Catherine Frazee

The clock has run out. One week from today, on Tuesday, June 7, the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in the Carter decision will come into force. Doctors in Canada will have the authority to end the lives of consenting adult patients who suffer intolerably from what they consider to be grievous and irremediable conditions.

The Supreme Court struck down certain provisions of our Criminal Code. They left 16 months for our legislators to find a way forward.

Will there be a federal law to regulate this practice? A proposal is on the table – Bill C-14. This week, our parliamentarians must decide not if that proposal could be made better, but *if it is good enough* – whether it is better to pass Bill C-14 into law, or to allow Monday's deadline to pass without a federal regulatory framework for access and safeguards.

Today, Canada's disability rights organizations have weighed in on this question. In an open letter to parliamentarians, we acknowledge that Bill C-14 is imperfect, but after weighty consideration, we conclude that it is good enough.

Our message to parliamentarians is simply this:

Attempts to improve C-14 by introducing amendments, however honourably intentioned, may significantly delay having a federal law. And delay is not without consequence. **Any strategy that results in delay will put the lives of vulnerable Canadians at risk.** It will do so because of uneven access to and regulation of this practice as shaped differently by medical authorities. It will do so because of inconsistent and inadequate standards for informed consent across the country. And it will do so because of a significant vacuum in reporting requirements that will leave Canadians in the dark about who is pursuing an assisted death and why.

In our view, Bill C-14 is appropriate to this moment.

As we prepare to launch what Dr. Jeff Blackmer, Vice President of the Canadian Medical Association, described as "no less than a sea change for physicians in Canada", we cannot afford the confusion of variable interpretations of what the law does and does not permit. We must have a consistent and clear understanding of what is legally required to end a life.

Bill C-14 would give us that clarity. That is why we support its passage into law.