

Ottawa
May 31, 2016

A Call to Parliamentarians from the National Disability Rights Community

“To Pass Bill C-14 to Ensure Constitutional Rights of Vulnerable Persons”

Dear Members of Parliament and Senators,

When the Supreme Court of Canada legalized euthanasia and assisted suicide in February 2015, it also declared that safeguards must be designed to protect vulnerable persons from harm.

Today, Disabled Canadians, speaking through our national organizations and with our supporters, and on the basis of decades of research, policy analysis and debate, call upon our parliamentarians to ensure that the minimal safeguards contained within Bill C-14 are legislated by June 6.

As Canadians we speak with deep conviction about the need for robust safeguards to protect vulnerable persons. That is because far too many Canadians are vulnerable — particularly those with disabilities. Many of us struggle to access basic supports and services, and to participate in decisions that affect our lives. Most perniciously, we are made vulnerable by the quiet and persistent reminders that our needs are costly and burdensome. At root is the insidious idea that our disabilities are too onerous for society, our families and even ourselves to bear. This is why a system of physician-assisted dying without robust safeguards will jeopardize the lives of vulnerable Canadians.

The threat posed by inducement is real. International research shows that vulnerable persons face added pressure, including:

- 1) coercion by others who are unable or unwilling to meet caregiving needs;
- 2) hopelessness arising from self-stigma and negative stereotypes about one's condition;
- 3) distorted insight into one's condition and available options, as a result of mental health issues;



- 4) psychological pressure resulting from interactions with health professionals; and,
- 5) lack of access to needed supports and information about alternate options.



While Bill C-14 does not fully address all the risks of error and abuse that arise from these realities, it does recognize that they exist and that safeguards are essential to protect the lives of vulnerable Canadians.

Bill C-14 also commits to study outstanding issues concerning advance directives, mature minors, and persons whose sole underlying condition is related to mental health. Despite this commitment, some argue access on these grounds must be included now, in this very first federal legislative framework. We respectfully disagree. Bill C-14 doesn't take these issues off the table. It says they merit further study and dialogue. Given the significant risks these issues raise for vulnerable persons, we believe Bill C-14 represents a more prudent approach than a legislative vacuum.



Of course, some have also suggested that there will be no real risk if Parliament fails to act now. We strongly disagree. Canadians seeking assisted death will face different rules and medical professionals will have different guidelines depending on their province or territory.

Currently, only five provinces have legislated standards of informed consent, none of which require assessment of vulnerability to undue influence or inducement to commit suicide.



There is only one way to protect the constitutional rights of Canadians in a system for medically-assisted death, and that is by Parliament fulfilling its obligation to establish a pan-Canadian system of safeguards.



We are calling on Parliament to respect the rights of Canadians to both autonomy and to protection of life. Bill C-14 is not a perfect bill — but it does include at least minimal safeguards that help to strike this balance.

It is important to recall that every Canadian is potentially vulnerable and that every vulnerable Canadian is at risk of inducement in a system without adequate safeguards. We ask for your support in passing this important legislation.



Sincerely,

Council of Canadians with Disabilities
 Canadian Association for Community Living



Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians
 Canadian Down Syndrome Society
 Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association
 Communication Disabilities Access Canada
 DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) Canada
 L'Arche Canada
 National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)
 National Network for Mental Health
 People First of Canada
 Resources Supporting Family and Community Legacies Inc. (Legacies Inc.)
 Association pour l'intégration sociale (Région de Québec)
 Community Living Ontario
 Inclusion Alberta
 Inclusion BC
 New Brunswick Association for Community Living
 Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living
 Nova Scotia Association for Community Living
 Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living
 Saskatchewan Association for Community
 Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities
 ARCH Disability Law Centre
 Autistic Self Advocacy Network (Winnipeg)
 Brockville & District Association for Community Involvement
 Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship, UBC
 Centre for Independent Living in Toronto
 Citizens With Disabilities Ontario
 Coalition of Persons with Disabilities Newfoundland and Labrador
 Community Living Selkirk
 Durham Association for Family Respite Services
 Fredericton Association for Community Living
 Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities Ethics Committee
 Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities
 PEI Council of People with Disabilities
 Toronto Board of Rabbis

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