

## **Testimony opposing legalization of assisted suicide**

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I am a professor emeritus of family medicine at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, Oregon. I have lived and practiced medicine in Oregon for almost 40 years. I am speaking for myself.

When I came to Oregon in 1979, the concept of assisted suicide was both unethical and illegal. Then, in 1994, this very concept, doctors assisting suicide, was wrapped in the euphemism “Death with Dignity” and narrowly passed 51-49. One of the chief promoters at the time was Patty Rosen, a nurse who said she helped her daughter to die with an overdose. The truth was the overdose didn’t work and she acknowledged 5 days before the vote that she ultimately had to “hit a vein” to end the life of her daughter. The reality then and now is that overdoses don’t always work. For example, David Pruitt took an overdose and woke 67 hours later saying, “What the hell happened; I thought I was supposed to be dead.” He was glad he was still alive and lived 11

more days before dying peacefully at home--with dignity without ever taking an overdose.

Despite these realities, promoters of assisted suicide assure us that the law is working well and that it is narrowly written and filled with multiple safeguards to avoid any abuses. They assured us that there is no “slippery slope.”

Yet this bill, like the recently passed bill that eliminates the waiting period of 15 days is clearly expanding the originally passed law and the way that people and doctors and can perform assisted suicide.

The bill distorts the meaning of the word “ingest”, a term that clearly indicates something that goes in one’s mouth, to include intravenous medication and even inhaled gases like helium or carbon monoxide. While it is possible for a patient to self-administer a drug through the vein, it is much easier for someone else to start an IV and inject a deadly drug. Obviously, this will open the door even wider for abuse.

A few years ago, ~~the~~ Sen. Steiner and Rep. Greenlick proposed expanding eligibility to those who are predicted to have a year rather than 6 months to live.

While that legislation failed, like the current bill if passed, it ~~would~~ ~~definitely~~ mean<sup>S</sup> that that the slippery slope is real. If 2217-A is passed, a person in Oregon labeled terminal by a doctor can kill themselves with an injection within days (if not the same day) that a request is made.

In summary, the bill before you today clearly expands the practice of assisted suicide. I believe those promoting the bill are misguided and are opening the door to further abuses.

Some of you may believe that the abuses that have already come to public light aren't that significant. Even so, I think you should still vote against this, as the abuses will surely increase with the availability of lethal injections in homes all over Oregon. I urge you to reject this well-intentioned but misguided legislation.