

My name is Maria Gallagher, and I come to you as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation, an affiliate of National Right to Life. I also come as a concerned mother, a daughter who has dealt with the health challenges of her parents, and an American citizen who is worried about the suicide tourism which is likely to expand under SB 1003.

In the year 2000, Jeanette Hall was told that she had only six months to live after receiving a cancer diagnosis. But she had a doctor who believed in her, who encouraged her not to give up. Twelve years later, she was still alive, and happy about it!

She readily admitted that, had her doctor believed in assisted suicide, she would have been dead, and would have missed out on so much of life. She expressed gratitude to her physician for giving her life with dignity.

The number one reason given for assisted suicide by its victims is not pain—it is loss of autonomy. They fear being a burden on others. That can be exacerbated when family members, friends, or medical professionals portray the patient as being a burden rather than a human being in need of care.

Shortening the existing waiting period, mandating promotion of assisted suicide by health care facilities, and broadening the definition of who can prescribe lethal drugs will only worsen a health care crisis which sees patients as problems rather than as people of priceless worth and dignity.

What about the patient who feels as if he or she is being pressured into assisted suicide because of the high cost of health care? What about the patient who is suffering from debilitating depression and needs treatment, but who does not receive it? What about the patient whose loneliness and fears drive him or her to want to stop living?

While I live in Pennsylvania, I see this legislation as a threat to not only citizens of Oregon, but all Americans, since Oregon has dropped its residency requirement for assisted suicide. That makes people across the country vulnerable to this corruption of the medical field. Under the scenario created by SB 1003, health care professionals will not be in the business of healing, but of hurting, at an accelerated pace.

Oregon's assisted suicide bill does not need to be expanded. What needs to be expanded are affordable health care, true compassion in the face of challenging circumstances, and a health care system that honors the value of patients, especially people with disabilities, who can become the most vulnerable in a pro-assisted suicide paradigm.

Please take the course of true compassion and patient-centered care and defeat SB 1003. So many precious lives are depending on the outcome of this critical decision.