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4 November 2009

Committee Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs References Committee  
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Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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Enquiry into Suicide

I write as a member of the Australian community and as a volunteer for a telephone counselling service. This submission does not represent the views of any organisation.

People contemplating suicide are to be approached with sensitivity, compassion and respect.

In my experience—ten years with the telephone counselling service—people who are contemplating suicide generally fear it and wish to escape it: they ring a service like Lifeline because they are seeking help to avoid death. Lifeline is a wonderful organisation, with well-motivated, well-trained volunteer counsellors and excellent paid staff. It saves lives and provides essential support to callers—those who are facing suicide and others who are not. Lifeline does great work on a shoestring budget. I ask that you accept that Lifeline merits Australian government support, including financial, and that you work to ensure that Lifeline has adequate funding. It is good that Lifeline is sponsored by Telstra but not ideal that this service should be dependent on a commercial company.

My second point relates to a category of person representing probably a small proportion of those considering suicide. I refer to people who have made a considered decision to suicide, perhaps because of grave illness or disability, particularly very poor health in old age. There should be no stigma attached to such a decision, nor should the state place barriers in the way of those who take it or of those who are willing to assist them. Hence:

- books such as Dr Philip Nitschke's *The Peaceful Pill Handbook* should be freely available;
- I call for the repeal of the *Suicide and Related Materials Act (2006)*, so that no one may be under threat for discussing suicide;
- I also call for the repeal of the act of parliament which overturned *The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act (1996)* so that the Northern Territory and the ACT may be free to legislate on end-of-life choices.

Yours sincerely

Ralph Secombe