
From: Margaret Middleton
Sent: Saturday, 29 March 2008 4:12 PM
To: Legal and Constitutional, Committee (SEN)
Subject: Voluntary Euthanasia legislation

Mr Peter Hallahan, Secretary
Legal and Constitutional Committee, Senate

Dear Mr Hallahan,

I wish to express my heartfelt support for Senator Brown's bill. Having reached the age of 80, entitlement to die with dignity at a time of my own choosing, rather than endure prolonged suffering, is of crucial importance to me. I am a psychologist with years of experience with elderly people, and have been very upset by the years of unwanted life forced on many of them, and the consequent prolonged suffering of them and of those who care about them. I have three friends now who would dearly like to die. One is 93 with incurable cancer who has been told she may last till the end of the year. The other two, 93 and 85, do not have terminal illnesses but have multiple degenerative problems, physical and mental, have dreary, uncomfortable and circumscribed lives, and yearn for a supply of Nembutal. They are all very depressed and frightened of the future. Only one of these people could benefit from the original NT Bill, but all would warmly welcome its reinstatement. It would give all of us strength in the hope that our deaths need not be preceded by unnecessary pain.

The knowledge that voluntary euthanasia is an option would improve the quality of life of the elderly by relieving them of much anxiety, though it is an option which I expect few would ultimately exercise. In parts of the world where voluntary euthanasia is legal, there has been no consequent upsurge in deaths in any age group as was predicted by those opposing it. It is important to stress the word **voluntary** in this debate, as all too often those who oppose the right of the individual to choose **his/her own** time and means of dying cite fears of the actions of unscrupulous others, even Hitler, in their grounds for opposition, hoping to influence the views of those uninformed or uncommitted on the issue.

Australia has shown itself to be a very humane society. There has been consistently strong support for measures directed towards child welfare, in rallying to help in natural disasters here or overseas, and in animal welfare. We would indeed be liable to prosecution if we willfully inflicted prolonged suffering on an animal as we do on so many of our aged or ill citizens. The religious beliefs that suffering is good for us, and that life must be preserved no matter what its quality, belonged more understandably in the Middle Ages than in the twenty-first century, and that a minority who hold them should be able to make the rest of us, who do not share them, live by them is irrational, unjust and completely unacceptable to me. The human life span is increasing faster than are improvements in the quality of life in old age, and increasing numbers of people are condemned to increasing years of chronic ill-health, social isolation and depression. From observing the operation of the Aged Care system at close quarters it is clear that it is seriously under-resourced, and the prospect of being at its mercy in the last stages of my life fills me with dread. Given my family history, dementia is my likely fate, and my wish is for the recognition of an advance directive which would require that my life be ended humanely when stated criteria of mental incompetence are met, but I hold little hope that will be possible in time for me. A reinstated NT Bill would fall far short of my wish list, but at least would enable me to avoid a death from a slow, painful and undignified physical illness. My remaining years will be much more enjoyable if the ACT passes a similar bill in the near future.

I urge the Senate to support Senator Brown's Bill.

(Dr) Margaret R. Middleton