



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

March 6, 2020

Honourable
Member of Parliament
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Honourable Mr. ,

I write to express, in the strongest possible terms, my opposition to Bill C-7, *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)* and ask that you vote against it. The legalization in 2016 of assisted suicide and euthanasia in limited circumstances launched our country on a trajectory by which the hastening of death would be increasingly viewed as preferable to the nurturing of life. By expanding eligibility for “MAiD,” Bill C-7 propels our country further along that path.

Among its proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, Bill C-7 seeks to remove, as an eligibility requirement for receiving “MAiD,” that a person’s natural death be reasonably foreseeable. Were this to be adopted into law, our country would be in the position of giving legal permission to medical practitioners not only to hasten the death of the dying but also to terminate the life of the living. This is unacceptable. The well-being of society and our ability to live together peaceably requires adherence to the inviolability of human life as an unassailable and necessary principle. Far from upholding this principle, the Parliament of Canada, if it passes Bill C-7, will effectively abandon it.

Another change to the law sought by Bill C-7 is to allow euthanasia to be given to a person who has lost the capacity to consent at the time it is administered, provided that the person had given their consent at an earlier moment and has been deemed otherwise eligible. Since, as we all know, people change their minds over time in response to changing circumstances, insights or feelings, this amendment would effectively transfer to the family and medical practitioners the burden of determining if a person has changed their mind, and thus effectively revoked consent, prior to delivery of the procedure. This is an unfair burden to place on anyone. No one has the right to make such a determination, and no one has the right to ask another to do so.

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The proposed legislation claims that it excludes persons whose sole underlying medical condition is mental illness from eligibility for “MAiD.” This strikes me as a hollow assurance. For one thing, existing legislation already allows lethal injections to be given to persons whose suffering is psychological. In the absence of a definition of “mental illness,” it is difficult to see how it does not fall under the category of psychological suffering. Furthermore, this assurance is in all probability only temporary at best. Bill C-7’s own preamble acknowledges that the legal review to be undertaken only a few months from now will ponder further expansion of eligibility for “MAiD” to persons whose sole underlying medical condition is mental illness. The Bill’s assurance of exclusion of such persons from “MAiD” is in effect no assurance at all.

A glaring omission in Bill C-7 is recognition of the conscience rights of those who refuse on religious or moral grounds to have anything to do with assisted suicide or euthanasia. If eligibility of access to death by these procedures is legally allowed to expand, pressure now being exerted upon individuals and institutions to participate in any way contrary to the demands of conscience or religious beliefs will inevitably grow stronger. The Parliament of Canada must uphold and protect this *Charter*-recognized right, which in practice is being seriously and alarmingly eroded.

Finally, I call upon you to work with your Parliamentary colleagues to expand access across Canada to excellent palliative care, which of its nature does not include assisted suicide or euthanasia. In the face of suffering endured by our fellow citizens, fundamental respect for their inherent dignity demands that we respond not by promoting and hastening their death but by affirming and nurturing their life. Excellent palliative care is a wonderful way to exercise this responsibility towards our suffering brothers and sisters, but access to it is woefully inadequate in our country. I ask you to respond to this inequity with resolve. Additionally, advocacy is required for social service programs, mental healthcare supports and counselling services. These, too, are critically important for vulnerable persons at the end of life.

Thank you for your attention to my concerns. As I await your response, I urge you to vote against Bill C-7.

Yours sincerely,



✠Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton

cc: Mr. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Mr. David Lametti, Minister of Justice
Ms. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
Ms. Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Disability Inclusion