

SENATE JUDICIARY  
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2/17/11  
S.B. 116

Dear Chairman Shockley and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am Christina Pfarr Hayden. My father is Dr. Paul Pfarr (deceased), formerly of Sanders County. I cared for my maternal grandmother in my home in Bozeman for 2 years until she died naturally at age 89. I now reside in Butte.

The democratic ideal acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, so that free and responsible persons may be protected for full participation in society. A genuinely human co-existence allows those whose lives and dignity are compromised to be protected. The tragedy of suicide breaks the ties of human solidarity within families, and within society. Physician-assisted suicide breaks the ties of trust between human persons and those in the medical profession, traditionally dedicated to relieving suffering and preserving life.

"Compassion" comes from Latin, "com-", with and "pati- (passus)", to suffer, to suffer with. It would never be an act of compassion to abandon anyone in a condition of such suffering in mind or body, that would lead them to such a state of despair as to seek self murder as the only remedy. Is it not a mis-interpretation of a "right to privacy" that would isolate and alienate such persons from the very care givers who would suffer with them, while seeking relief from their suffering to the best of their ability?

Suffering weakens us, making us vulnerable enough to reach out, to entrust ourselves to others for the care we need in order to recover our strength and autonomy. If a diagnosis of suffering may result in a prescription of death, trust in the medical profession will break down. Physicians themselves may be vulnerable to being used to execute the death of a patient. The poor, the elderly, and the sick may be vulnerable to coercion to consent to suicide, and require legal protection, from greedy heirs, insurance companies, public servants, and others who would prey on their vulnerability.

Administering lethal drugs is an act of violence, a death penalty. Physician assisted suicide would legally protect those who collaborate in acts of violence against suffering persons, because they are guilty of human suffering. Have we become intolerant of human suffering because we are becoming ever more unwilling to suffer for and with those who suffer? The best of what it means to be human, is to be with and for others, that they may live. What is at stake is the human person, his solidarity with other persons, in his human condition as one who suffers, and his right to authentic human compassion when he suffers.

A physician administering lethal dosages of otherwise healing medicines in order to relieve human suffering, does not participate in a healing profession, without changing the meaning of medicine and life itself. Suffering is a condition of human life, as is death. When death becomes the remedy for suffering, life itself becomes the disease, and death becomes the cure. Great harm will be done to the medical profession if physicians cooperate in executing the wishes of a suffering patient by assisting in his execution. A "human" remedy would be to strengthen the family to care for it's own, to provide for sufficient social and health care services to any Montanan, suffering to such an extent as to be vulnerable, because of suffering, to suicide. Palliative care for pain, and psychotropic drugs for depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders, are moral and legal remedies, and when available, may remove any motivation for ending life by suicide.

Please protect Montanans from Physician Assisted Suicide. Please vote YES in SB 116.

P.S. See attached a testimony from Ben Cartwright from the Bonanza TV show.

Testimony of Ben Cartwright, Ponderosa Ranch, Virginia City, in dialogue with his son, Joseph. Transcribed from BONANZA : Season 5, Episode 9 (3 & 4), originally aired Nov. 17, 1963. (Source: Google)

Ben: Men generally know the difference between right and wrong. When they're wrong they don't always like to admit it.

Joe: I don't know right from wrong anymore.

Ben: Surely , you don't want me to decide for you?

Joe: I don't. I have to make the decision myself. Maybe you could tell me what you would have done in the same situation. This situation could happen to anybody, and they'd have to decide.

A man is badly hurt, and his friend knows he's in a lot of pain, with only a short time to live, his last moments filled with agony. The man asks his friend if he would end it, and begs him to put him out of his misery, to just be able to die. And his friend kills him. Was that wrong, Pa?

Ben: Don't you know?

Joe: I'm not sure.

Ben: I'm sure. I'm very sure. That was wrong!

Joe: How can you be so sure, for what the friend was going through?

Ben: It wasn't up to the friend to make the decision, no matter how much pain the injured man was going through. It's not up to the friend to decide.

Joe: Can't you understand? He did it out of pity! He thought it would be more merciful! He couldn't watch this man die in agony!

Ben: He couldn't watch his friend die in agony? Well, how about the injured man? Don't you think that in his suffering, he was trying desperately to live, not to die?

Joe: He begged him to help him to die!

Ben: I've always believed that when a man is really badly hurt, when his body is badly broken, nature tries to pick up the pieces and make him whole again. Now , I don't know if she knows how much pain she is causing the man while she's mending his body, but her main purpose is to preserve life. To nature, life is sacred, whether the body is whole or crippled. That's why I think that no one has the right to end someone else's life. Nature doesn't give up that easily. She's always working for survival, not for destruction. She doesn't always know when she's licked. When she finally does admit to it, I guess there's nothing a man can do except to yield to the inevitable. But until that moment. No man has the right morally or legally to snuff out a man's chance to survive.

Joe: Then you'd just let him suffer?

Ben: I'd help him all I could. I'd do everything I could, get all the help. I'd try to ease the pain. I have seen a man in this condition. I've seen a lot of men trampled in the stampedes. None of them died right away. They were in terrible pain, but none of them wanted to die. See, a man, when he is in bad pain, doesn't know what he is saying. His body is fighting for survival and his mind isn't always aware of that. It's suffering the pain, so he begs to die. He shouldn't be listened to. The friend should listen only to the pulse of life. Fight with it, not against it . You think about it, Joe.