

Testimony before House Judiciary Committee, February 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Doris Fischer. I live in Sheridan, Montana.

I speak today for myself, and for my deceased partner Richard.

Richard died of Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). Despite the best hospice and palliative care, he experienced great pain in his final weeks. Most acute were his terrifying episodes of feeling like he was suffocating, as his ability to breathe steadily dwindled. He also described feeling trapped, chained to the bed, stuck to the chair as he lost his ability to move independently. He had frequent and horrific leg cramps that lasted nearly an hour each time, despite massage and pain medication.

Richard died in 2009, just months before the Montana Supreme Court issued the Baxter decision, ruling that nothing in Montana law prohibits physician aid in dying. Richard wanted, but didn't have, this end-of-life choice. We in Montana now do. Having this choice gives me peace of mind. But HB 328 would take this individual freedom away from us. Please, stay out of the bedrooms of terminally ill Montanans.

One of your own, Rep. Daniel Zolnikov, was eloquent last week speaking about digital privacy. "I'm a very liberty-minded individual," he said. "I just believe in a limited role of the state in individuals' lives."

I will say it more strongly. How DARE the sponsor and supporters of HB 328 presume to tell Richard, or me should I become terminally ill, how I can and cannot die? How DARE you threaten to send my doctor to jail for providing the ultimate in compassionate medical care were I to request it. Such a deeply personal matter should be between me, my doctor, my family, and my God. I don't need six words. Four will do: Stay out of it.