

Testimony in Opposition to HB477

My name is Ethel Byrnes E T H E L B Y R N E S

While I was testifying against HB328, this committee heard me speak of my husband Erwin Byrnes' choice to end his suffering using physician aid in dying. Erwin was a good man full of compassion and thoughtfulness. He always treated me with love and respect. He taught our children to stand up for what they believed in, and to do so while respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Erwin also believed in playing by the rules and abiding by the law. When Erwin chose aid in dying, he knew he met all the criteria. He was terminally ill, an adult of sound mind, and able to self-administer the medication. He had the support of his family and others, with whom he had freely discussed all the considerations. He knew this was a legal act that would harm no others; it would not tear apart the fabric of society; it would simply give him release from the pain and suffering; the chance to die unafraid and at peace. Do we not all have the right to act according to our conscience, as long as our actions do not harm another?

HB477 would change the law and if you pass this bill, I would be a criminal for discussing and agreeing to Erwin's plan. His doctor would be arrested. Our children would all be guilty of a crime. Three hospice workers would be in jail.

If you support this bill I would ask one thing of you. Picture me behind bars in Deer Lodge. Put there simply for the act of loving my husband and supporting his choice. Can you imagine yourself feeling satisfied or even jubilant? I hope not. I'll finish with a quote by Henry David Thoreau: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each others eyes for an instant? HB477 is not good policy for Montana. No on HB477. Thank you