

Dear Honorable Senators.

Please allow me to express my concern regarding a provision in SB 494 which allows for the withholding of food and water from patients with dementia or mental illness. I would like to share from my own experience with severe mental illness which I hope will help put a human face on this matter. I sometimes subjected myself to extreme starvation and dehydration even to the point of being life-threatening. I want to testify that it was an extremely tormenting experience. I do not have the typical anorexia nervosa but rather was motivated by great fear and guilt feelings. I desperately needed help and although my family cared about me I felt I did not receive some of the help that might have been called for. I sympathize with the fact that those in authority over the person can be very confused and deeply troubled themselves over what they are observing and can cause them to feel emotions like anger, frustration and hopelessness. It could cause them to want to give up on the person. Certainly caregivers are often very limited in what they are able to do for a person but if they knew what agony it was to experience starvation and dehydration, I hope that withholding food and water would not be considered an option.

Often we are able to dismiss from our minds the suffering that goes on behind closed doors. Please forgive me for making a crude comparison but I think of how those living around the concentration camps of the Holocaust must have known that terrible things were happening yet were able to disregard it because the suffering was not visible to them. Many of these would have been very kindly people who would have cared deeply had they seen what was being inflicted on fellow human beings. So I appeal to the compassion of those who are making the decisions regarding this law, not to withhold food and water from these helpless individuals especially if they are at all capable of partaking of nourishment.

I would like also to express my respect and gratitude to you who serve as our country's leaders. And thank you for taking time to read this.

Respectfully, Winston Carozza