

To the House Health Care Committee:

Having worked as a hospice social services counselor, a geriatric care manager, and a court-appointed guardian for a total of 18 years, I have struggled with end-of-life questions many times. Essentially all of my clients died and almost all of them had dementia. I do not take these issues lightly.

There is a vast difference between offering food and/or water toward the end of life and respecting a person's choice, or their body's ability, to accept or reject it, with the aim of keeping someone comfortable, versus, withholding food and/or water with the express purpose of hastening death. There is an enormous difference between someone choosing assisted suicide and having food and/or water withheld from them without their consent or even understanding. As a society and as individuals, we must provide humane care for seniors and others who depend on us.

Another great concern is what is done mentally and emotionally to caregivers who are instructed to withhold or prohibited from providing food and/or water to an individual whose body is still able to process food and/or water. We are responsible for not putting caregivers in a situation that goes against their instincts, values, and training but rather inures them to passive violence and confusion regarding fair and proper care for all people.

I urge you to vote NO on HB 4135

Best regards,

Georgi A. Gentry, MA, NCG