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Regarding HB 4135 –Opposition to

Dear Representative Mitch Greenlick, Ph.D., Chair, House Committee on Health Care, and members of the House Committee on Health Care.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak and testify to you regarding HB 4135, for which I have great concern because of the proposed removal of protections to vulnerable Oregonians.

I have been practicing medicine as a cancer doctor in Oregon since 1967, caring for thousands of patients over those 51 years. Dr. Greenlick and I were each department chairs together in the OHSU School of Medicine 25 years ago.

I am concerned that this bill will expand the authority of a healthcare representative to withhold basic food and water to a conscious but incapable person. I consider that to be very dangerous to that individual.

Our new grandson was born in Albany a week ago today. He is conscious but incapable. My son reports that following his birth, their son cried and by his actions indicated that he was very hungry. And he readily responded to and was comforted by being fed. He exhibited the basic need for nutrition, even within the first few minutes of his birth. That basic need continues throughout our lives.

On the other end of life's spectrum, I have cared for many individuals who were conscious but incapable. They required assistance in being fed, but they readily responded to and accepted the food and liquids that were provided and extended to them. And their families and friends enjoyed their opportunities to be with them.

My father-in-law died 5 years ago, and he was still hungry and appreciated eating even 4 hours before to his death.

By expanding the authority of a healthcare representative of a conscious but incapable person, we will be denying that vulnerable person the basic need of food and water without their permission, ultimately acting inhumanely by denying them even this simple necessary end of life care.

This basic care that we provide to even infants.

HB 4135 is dangerous and not in the best interest of Oregonians.

I am also very concerned by testimony from HB 4135 proponents who are calling this a “right to die” law.

Laws in this area of health care should be protection laws and not “right to die” laws.

I urge your committee to not pass this bill.

Thank you, and very sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth R. Stevens, Jr., MD