

Date: June 4, 2019

Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 579

Oregon House Rules Committee

Dear members of the House Rules Committee,

I have been a medical physician for 53 years. I have been on the OHSU Radiation Oncology faculty since 1972. I was chair of the OHSU Radiation Oncology Department from 1989 to 2005, and I am currently Emeritus Professor of Radiation Oncology at OHSU. I continue to practice medicine. I have cared for many thousands of patients with cancer. My first wife died of cancer in 1982. I have studied assisted suicide for many years and have learned of its many inherent dangers to patients, medicine and society.

Senate Bill 579 is one of the four bills proposed in the 2019 Oregon Legislative Assembly that would eliminate the limited safeguards in Oregon's assisted suicide law. If these "safeguards" are eliminated, then members in medical fields, doctors specifically, will have a wider opportunity to end their patient's lives.

Currently, those who desire to die from assisted suicide in Oregon have a 15-day waiting period as an opportunity to really understand and reflect on their decision to end their life. This is a heavy and momentous decision; a decision to end one's life prematurely. The original language of this law recognizes the seriousness of this decision. The 15-day waiting period protects patients from making a hasty decision from which they can never recover. It protects them from making a hasty decision to end their life, a decision that may be influenced by others.

It is very very difficult for physicians to predict the life expectancy of their individual patients. In my more than 50 years of medical practice I have learned to be very cautious in making a prediction of how many days an individual patient has to live. And I have learned not to make such a pronouncement to a patient. This is especially true regarding a life expectancy of 15 days or less.

The proposed language in SB 579 removes this important 15-day waiting period that is for the protection of vulnerable patients. Why is this needed if someone is felt to be within 15 days of dying? Especially since making such a 15-day or less prediction is so fraught with error. The new proposed language even permits a person to obtain lethal drugs and end their life on the same day when they have made the decision to use the law! This is not what Oregonians voted for in 1994 and 1997. SB 579 removes the protection from making a too hasty decision to end one's life; a decision that may be maliciously influenced by others.

This bill removes important protections for vulnerable patients.

I urge you to protect Oregonians who will be harmed by SB 579.

I urge you to not accept this bill.

Dr. Kenneth R. Stevens, Jr., MD, Sherwood, OR 97140