

Chairman Kagan, thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Lauri Costello, from La Plata county, and I'm here to support HB16-1054.

I am a family physician who recently moved to Durango; I practiced in WA State for 25 years that included 2008 when voters made WA the second state to legalize medical aid in dying in what is called the Death with Dignity Act.

I would like to begin by clarifying some terms. The term "physician assisted suicide" is, frankly, quite offensive to me as a physician and to many of my physician colleagues. This term does not refer to any legal medical procedure and insinuates that physicians help their patients commit suicide. Suicide and euthanasia are both illegal in all 50 States and will remain so. Neither is remotely related to medical aid in dying, which this bill addresses.

You may be aware of the experience in Oregon, the first state have a Death with Dignity Act, in 1997. I would like to briefly review the numbers from WA state. The law went into effect on March 5, 2009. In the first 10 months, through December of 2009, there were 63 prescriptions written and 36 of those people actually ingested the medication. The numbers increased each year until 2013 when 173 prescriptions were written and 119 people actually ingested the medication. The numbers were very similar in 2014 and the 2015 numbers have not yet been released by the department of health. The total numbers in WA state through 2014 are 723 prescriptions dispensed with 485 ingestions, or 67% of people who received a prescription that actually ingested the medication to end their life. In OR, since 1997 when the law took effect, the percentage is roughly 65%.

As in OR and the other 3 States with Medical Aid in Dying, WA has had no unintended consequences and there have been no attempts to revise or repeal the law. It is working beautifully in all of the states where it is legal.

I would like to emphasize that participation in Aid in Dying is entirely voluntary for both patient and physician. Those who oppose it simply do not have to participate. If the process continues to be unavailable to the people of Colorado, there will be continued needless suffering in the last days of life. In addition, the significant majority of Colorado voters who support this law will have to vote it in at the next election. It would be much simpler if this Committee simply supported the will of the people even if some members don't personally agree with it.

Thank you for your time and for your hard work. Please feel to contact me anytime. Are there any questions?

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