

Honorable Senators of Colorado:

Thank you for this opportunity and privilege to say a few words about SB 16-025. I am Gary Jewell, a family physician and a retired Air Force Veteran who has had the pleasure and privilege of assisting many people to live healthier lives during the last 36 years. I have often been struck with wonder at the growth of a child inside their mother, watching them take their first breath, and seeing them grow and flourish. I have often been astounded at the intimate transparency of an almost complete stranger telling me why he came to the office. And I have many times stood by a hospital bedside longing for the ability to give more life to the person lying there, life so they could go back home and continue the relationships with those whom they love.

One of the people who chose to come see me I'll call Mr. Miller. He and his wife and 5 children had been patients for a number of years. In 2000 all Mr. Miller's children were grown and successfully raising families of their own. He had been a smoker for a while but stopped many years before. Yet, his newly persistent cough demanded further evaluation. The testing showed a well-entrenched cancer in his right lung. Consultation with pulmonary and oncology concluded that his cancer was untreatable. It would likely take his life within the next six months or less.

Mr. Miller came to the office right away to discuss what the experts had concluded. Our discussion covered the most probable course and what he should expect, punctuated by my reassurance that we could minimize the expected pain and distressing breathing symptoms.

As our conversation drew to a close I asked him whether the important relationships in his life were up to date. Were there any open-ended issues that needed further talk and even forgiveness asked for or offered? He reassured me that all relationships, with his wife, each of his children and his friends were current.

With his imminent death approaching I congratulated him on a life well lived. Then I asked if he would be willing to teach his children one more thing. Yes, he had taught them how to live, but now he had the privilege of teaching them how to die.

He was quiet for a moment and then smiled. He replied that he would gladly take on this new role and seek to do it as well as he could.

Before us is a bill that will truncate the lives of people, perhaps leaving this lesson, and others untaught. When I signed up to become a doctor, I did so knowing that I would be assisting people throughout their lives, even to life's end. I did not sign on to assist anyone to end his or her life early, nor make the judgment that a life destroying illness suddenly made a person's life no longer worth living.

Honorable Senators, physician assisted suicide is dangerous.

Physician assisted suicide is dangerous to physicians as it severs the trust that binds the relationships so essential to the caring profession of medicine. It makes us doctors the judge, jury, and assistant executioner.

Physician aid-in-dying is dangerous for patients. Suffering brings on depression. Both suffering and depression preclude rational thinking presumed by the authors of the proposed bill.

The decision to end a life early is dangerous for families because of the loss of opportunity to resolve relationship issues. Differing opinions about taking ones life can leave family divisions. Coercion in various forms changes 'the right to die' to 'the duty to die.' Will assisted suicide create more suffering that it purports to eliminate?

“Death with dignity” is dangerous for society. Other nations, such as the Netherlands, have proven that it can become a slippery slope to euthanasia.

(I only summarize some of these dangers.)

Senate Bill 16-025 ends with, “The general assemble hereby finds, determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, and safety”. Are you persuaded enough to declare that making legal the taking of life, is “necessary” to preserve public peace, health, and safety” for the people of Colorado? This act also requires redefining words like “suicide” and “natural death.” The bill restructures legislative and physician responsibilities.

Why would we desire to diminish our solemn yet essential responsibility to protect life? As a seasoned physician, I do not desire to do so.

I implore you to kill this bill in committee.