

Compassion and Choices Seeks Support for Assisted Suicide

Joe Capizzi, Ph.D.

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The fine people at “Compassion and Choices” were kind enough to send me a solicitation letter the other day. “Dear Friend,” they write and began to celebrate the near anniversary of the Supreme Court’s ruling upholding an Oregon law permitting “American adults the right to choose a dignified, pain-free, humane death with help from their doctors.”

“What a grand day this ruling brought to Compassion and Choices,” they continue, “[and to] those who are terminally ill and suffering and defenders of freedom everywhere – what a victory for the individual!” Their “grand day” however, is spoiled by the looming dark clouds of religious zealotry; the kind of zealotry that seeks to steal from us Americans our “right to self-determination.” Indeed, my new pen-pals tell me, their hearts were broken by the failure of California bill AB651, a bill that “would have given terminally ill Californians the right to a physician’s aid in dying.” I share their frustration: if there’s one thing I find heart-breaking, it’s democracy getting in the way of my right to ask my doctor to kill me!

The bill whose failure ruined Compassion’s day, let’s be clear, was an assisted suicide legislation bill. The language of the bill, just like the language in the letter, is a morass of euphemisms that seek to mask the bill’s clear intent (just follow [this link](#) to see the amended bill). The purpose of the bill is no less than to authorize assisted suicide, to grant a patient not merely the “right” to die, but the right thereby to call on assistance in dying. And let’s be clearer still: the effect of such legislation would eventually create a duty of the medical professional – such a professional would cease to be a doctor in any recognizable sense – to assist the patient in their death. One of the many good reasons to oppose bills authorizing assisted suicide is precisely the common-sense intuition that where one person claims a right to something, soon he will claim of you your obligation to give it to him. The right to “make a request for medication for the purpose of ending his or her life”, uh, I mean, “prescribed pursuant to this bill to provide comfort...” will surely, if passed, over time entail the transformation of good medical practices into the duty of certain doctors to honor that request. Put differently, the defenders of freedom at Compassion and Choices are the vanguard of a movement whose rearguard will compel the medical profession to perform this “fundamental civil right.”

Much as it pains me, beyond this little column, I won’t be responding to my friends at Compassion and Choices. But when the air turns crisp and the leaves begin to yellow and brown and my thoughts turn, as they always do in the fall, to our fundamental civil right to be killed, I’ll be thinking of the good people at Compassion and Choices.



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