

## **Statehouse March 6 Testimony John Kelly, Second Thoughts Director**

My name is John Kelly, I am Director of Second Thoughts: People with Disabilities Opposing the Legalization of Assisted Suicide. I will speak to the issue of self-determination, on which hinges the proponents' argument for the law.

But the fact is that we **already have** self determination, as we can refuse any and all lifesaving treatment. Gone are the days of unnecessary invasive treatments. People can have an advance directive, they can choose someone to make decisions if they can't. And you have the right to pain relief, all the way up to palliative sedation, which in effect lets you die in your sleep. For these reasons, the law is unnecessary.

This law **restricts** choice as it jeopardizes lives. Misdiagnosis has always impacted self-determination, but this law makes misdiagnosis fatal. In Oregon, Jeanette Hall requested prescribed suicide after receiving a terminal diagnosis with cancer. Her doctor persuaded her to try more treatment. 11 years after her diagnosis, her recent letter to the Globe urged us to avoid Oregon's mistake.

Economic pressure already restricts patient choice, this law makes it a scandal. In Oregon, cancer patients Barbara Wagner and Randy Stroup were denied life extending treatment. The same rejection letter offered to cover \$50 worth of barbiturates.. How long before we have similar cases here?

The law ignores social context and family pressures. The first doctor Oregonian Kate Cheney saw thought her daughter was coercing her. But no data gets gathered from doctors who say no, and there is no penalty for doctors to do not report. As in Kate Cheney's case, it only takes one doctor to write the prescription. After her family put her in a nursing home for a week, Kate finally said yes the day she returned home. She was dead the same day.

The law allows an heir with a financial interest to be one of the two witnesses for the request, and takes no interest in what happens to the drugs when brought into the home. Elder abuse is already a huge problem in Massachusetts, let's not compound it.

With assisted suicide, self-determination becomes a slogan, not a reality.