

Michael Muehe panel talk before Joint Judiciary Committee on H.3884  
Tuesday, March 06, 2012 1:30 p.m.

Good afternoon, my name is Michael Muehe and I am a lifelong resident of Massachusetts. For the past 30 years, I have been an advocate for civil rights for people with disabilities. Currently I am the director of the Disabilities Commission in Cambridge; although my comments today are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Disabilities Commission. Legalizing assisted suicide sets up a double standard that is deadly to people with disabilities. For most people in our society, someone attempting to commit suicide is interpreted by our society as "a cry for help." Actually committing suicide is seen as an irrational act, a preventable tragedy. Suicide prevention programs have been established in Massachusetts and nationwide to try to help stop individuals from committing suicide. This represents a sound public health policy, and, by and large, these programs have been quite successful in reducing the number of suicides and in educating the public about the preventability of suicide. But laws that establish a mechanism for physician-assisted suicide communicate exactly the opposite to specific subset of our society - people with disabilities, people with terminal illness, and seniors. Assisted suicide laws communicate a specific message to these individuals, namely, your attempt to commit suicide is entirely rational, and our society should act proactively to support you and help ensure that your attempt to commit suicide is successful - by giving you a lethal dose of prescription pills. This is discrimination -- pure and simple -- that targets seniors and people with disabilities, because they are devalued, and their lives are already seen as less worth living. But a society that supports and provides assisted suicide (instead of suicide prevention) to certain devalued individuals is not in step with Massachusetts' progressive tradition as a leader against discrimination. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.