

Subject: Brief submitted to the Special Committee on Dying with Dignity
Author: Christina Calder

A Personal Testimony

Although I no longer live in Quebec, I spend my summers in the province and have many friends in Montreal and so feel concerned by the proposed bill on dying with dignity. Legalizing euthanasia in Quebec would not only endanger the lives of the weak and vulnerable but would also set a precedent for the rest of Canada. I therefore wish to voice my strong opposition to the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

My personal experience makes me especially aware of the dangers this legalization entails. A friend of mine in Montreal recently recovered from a deep depression. During her sickness, she often 'wished she were dead', claiming that life was burdensome and unbearable. Besides directing her to the appropriate medical care, I did my best to accompany her and help her feel loved and needed. Now that she is better, this friend wishes to help others learn how to avoid depression and value life.

Some years ago, my father went through a similarly difficult time when he became ill with cancer. My family accompanied him with love and understanding and ensured that he received the proper medical care. Now he is in full remission and is enjoying his grandchildren. Had euthanasia been an option, my father might have considered it a duty, so as to avoid being a so-called burden on the family or an expense to the State. Moreover, the psychological suffering and anguish that accompany a serious illness might have made him turn to euthanasia, especially if he had not had the family's love and reassuring care.

In fact, many of the sick and dying suffer above all from loneliness and the impression that they are a burden upon their loved ones. This can lead to a depression like my friend's and a desire to die. The solution, however, as both my friend and father can testify, is to treat and cure these symptoms with love and understanding. Friends, family and health care professionals can help the weak realize that they are useful and wanted members of society with a mission: they have true wisdom to impart and can help bring out the best in those who care for them. Providing such people with this sense of purpose can alleviate the most dreadful part of their suffering, the moral suffering of feeling unwanted or unloved, the suffering of loneliness and depression. This, along with the excellent palliative care that modern technology makes available can help them live their last moments with true dignity and without rejecting the gift of life.

Should euthanasia be legalized however, society will be greatly dehumanized: many will be prematurely robbed of their loved ones and deprived of the occasion to love them and learn from them. Should euthanasia be legalized, many sick and dying will feel obliged to choose death so as to avoid being burdensome; in their state of depression, they may in fact see this as the only option. They will thus be deprived of moments of true happiness that they could still have experienced thanks to adequate treatment.

I therefore urge the Quebec government to promote a culture of life. We must tell the weak that they are valued and loved; offering them the option of death can only be construed as promoting that option. We must acknowledge that a society that fails to protect its weakest members is a society on the

decline. Let Quebec set the example of affirming the value of life, no matter its form. Let Quebec promote excellent palliative care, not euthanasia.