

**Bill C-14 - Physician Assisted Death Legislation**  
**A time for Citizen Engagement**  
**April 24, 2016**

In February 2015 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the existing laws on euthanasia and assisted suicide and gave the Federal Government a deadline to replace those laws. That deadline expires on June 6, 2016. Since the change in government there has been intensive study and debate on these issues that have culminated in the release of Bill C-14. In the next several weeks (late April through early May) Members of Parliament will be reflecting on this bill and making a decision. As a Christian Reformed church/Reformed Church of America, we want you to know that you as citizens now have an important opportunity to express your concerns on this important legislation.

In Bill C-14 the Government is addressing the Supreme Court requirements (to make assisted death legal in Canada) in a measured way, by proposing strict limits on access to medically assisted death. This legislation is by no means perfect, but it provides a first step to avoiding a dangerous legal vacuum (i.e. no restrictions on assisted death) that would result if no law is passed by June 6. In recent submissions to government the Centre for Public Dialogue has argued that if medically assisted death must be a legal reality that legislation and policy should: protect vulnerable people from involuntary euthanasia; protect the conscience rights of medical care providers and institutions; be subject to careful tracking and legislative review; and enhance palliative care options.

Bill C-14 provisions that we're watching:

- As it stands Bill C-14 does not make clear provisions for conscience protection for medical care providers and institutions. It leaves these protections to 'non-legislative' measures that are to come through discussion and regulation with medical associations and provinces. We will be asking for clearer legislative provisions for conscience protection.
- C-14 restricts eligibility for assisted death to people who are near the end of life. This is a stronger restriction than more permissive ideas floated by a Parliamentary Committee earlier this year (i.e. access for 'mature minors' and persons with mental illness).
- The provisions for informed consent in the Bill provide protections for vulnerable people. Disability advocates argue that these provisions should be strengthened with clear commitments to screening for vulnerability to outside influence favouring assisted death.
- Bill C-14 makes provisions for the collection of data on assisted death and a 5-year review of the legislation. Thoughtful tracking and analysis of this data will reveal the legal and ethical challenges that are likely to emerge, challenges which can be addressed in robust public dialogue in the review period.

In the course of our work with Parliamentarians on this issue for the last few months, MPs have told us that they are hearing very little from their constituents on the issue of assisted death. We encourage you to share your interest and concern on this issue with your MP in the next weeks as they debate Bill C-14. In fact, April 23-May 1 MPs will be in your community for a 'constituency week' and could take a meeting with you. Constructive and respectful dialogue on assisted death *right now* is:

- an important means to avoid a dangerous legal vacuum; and
- a great opportunity to speak in support of compassion at the end of life, the protection of vulnerable people, and the protection of conscience.

For further information and action ideas citizens can check on these resources:

A collection of our recent interactions with government on the issue of assisted death:  
<https://www.crcna.org/Canada/social-justice-canada/life-issues-abortion-euthanasia>

Commentary of the Canadian Council on Disabilities on Bill C-14 and the “Vulnerable Persons Standard”  
<http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/humanrights/endoflife/Vulnerable-Persons-Standard-March2016>

Medically assisted death is an ethically complex sensitive issue that requires thoughtful dialogue. These next few weeks are a time for prayer for our elected leaders, and for constructive citizenship. Please pray and act as you feel led.

Serving Christ with you,

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