



**Response by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the tabling
of Bill C-7: “An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)”**

The Catholic Bishops of Canada wish to express the greatest concern and dismay in regards to the tabling of Bill C-7 which seeks to expand the eligibility criteria for euthanasia and assisted suicide by removing the “reasonable foreseeability of natural death” criterion currently in the Criminal Code. The bill would also loosen some of the existing “safeguards” and would even allow patients whose death is “reasonably foreseeable” to waive final consent to receiving euthanasia by making an advance directive. This means that those who change their minds at a later date, but whose ability to communicate has since been impaired, would be left to express their refusal in potentially vague “words, sounds, and gestures” (Bill C-7, 3.2.c), making it immensely difficult and highly subjective for medical practitioners and lawyers to decipher whether or not the patient still wishes to consent to the lethal procedure.

Discounting the open letter from over sixty-five of [Canada’s leading disability advocate organizations](#), and ignoring the stark apprehensions expressed in the [End of Mission Statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) concerning the implementation of “Medical Assistance in Dying” in Canada from a disability perspective, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada regrettably chose not to appeal the Quebec Superior Court decision (*Truchon v. Procureur général du Canada*) and is now imprudently moving forward to amend the Criminal Code to accommodate the Superior Court’s ruling.

It is very troubling that the introduction of Bill C-7 was justified on the basis of a highly questionable, biased and rushed online survey, which took place over just two weeks between 13 and 27 January 2020. First, the questions in this survey were framed in a manner which presupposed agreement with euthanasia and assisted suicide, including its broadening, without giving Canadians who are opposed an equal voice. Second, while garnering close to 300,000 responses (less than 1% of the population), it regrettably did not ask for detailed and essential demographic data from participants (age, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.), hence, the online survey cannot purport to represent a “wide spectrum” of the Canadian population, as has been claimed. Third, the online survey excluded households which cannot afford the internet, and made it ever more difficult for those people living in remote northern communities, the elderly, as well as individuals with visual, cognitive, and mobility impairments to participate. Such a flawed survey cannot be used realistically to justify Bill C-7. Furthermore, the “roundtable consultations” conducted by the Government this past January and February, clearly excluded at least a number of major stakeholders, and thus fell short in engaging the public in a comprehensive democratic process.

With Bill C-7, the Government has effectively short-circuited the mandatory assessment of euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada as provided in the [original Act of 17 June 2016 to amend the Criminal Code](#), which specifically called for “a parliamentary review of [the Act’s] provisions and of the state of palliative care in Canada to commence at the start of the fifth year following the day on which [the Act] receives Royal Assent.”

The Catholic Bishops of Canada with Catholic faithful as well as innumerable other Canadians – religious or otherwise – remain opposed to euthanasia and assisted suicide in any form because of their interest in protecting and promoting human life, because it is always wrong to take the life of an innocent person, and because medical science and compassionate care have provided effective ways of easing pain and suffering without having to resort to direct killing. It would be beneficial to recall once again the [World Medical Association’s stance reaffirming its long-standing policy of opposition to euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide](#).

As episcopal Catholic leadership in Canada, the Bishops further wish to impress upon the Government: first, given the lamentable legislative aim, that every opportunity for due diligence be taken during the parliamentary process; second, that every effort be made to understand more fully the grave implications of what is being contemplated by way of Bill C-7, including the unavoidable, negative and detrimental dangers facing those who are most vulnerable in society. For these reasons, the Bishops sincerely hope and earnestly request that the House of Commons exercises its ability to refer Bill C-7 to a committee for detailed examination before Second Reading, as is permitted according to the [Standing Orders \(Ch. 9 § 73\)](#), in order to allow input from expert witnesses in a manner which is fully public, transparent, and open to a wide range of voices – religious and non-religious alike – as well as in full and prudent consideration of inviolable moral and ethical principles, the common good, and concern for future generations.

The Catholic Bishops of Canada are strongly opposed to this proposed legislation and will monitor the parliamentary process closely. They call upon all Canadians to make their voices heard; they strongly urge members of Parliament to acknowledge the giftedness of life as an inalienable right not to be taken away by others, the importance of compassion for the ill and the dying, as well as our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us.

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