

SENATE
The Honourable Betty Unger



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CANADA

Proposed euthanasia law dodges all the difficult questions

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It's beginning to look like a pattern: Dodge the difficult questions and defer them to the future. The Trudeau government has done it again with its euthanasia legislation.

Deceptively named, "Medical assistance in dying" the legislation initially pulls back from the radical suggestions made by the Joint Committee on Physician Assisted Suicide, but then circles back and leaves almost all the doors wide open.

- How old do you have to be to request "medical assistance in dying"? Eighteen. However, the government is going to study that further and possibly make it available to children as well.
- Will those suffering from mental illness be able to apply? No. But maybe. They're going to study that further, too.
- Can people make advance requests for medical assistance in dying? No. Well, not yet, anyhow. They'll study that one as well.
- And what about protection for conscience rights, does that exist? Um, we'll let the provinces handle that.
- And palliative care? Will those who are suffering grievously be offered palliative care before being offered death? Nope. That's not important enough to legislate. Instead, the government is going to "develop non-legislative measures that would support the improvement of a full range of options for end-of-life care", whatever that means.
- What about a waiting period? Sort of – 15 days. But the doctor can shorten that timeframe.

It is difficult to know where to begin to amend this Bill in order to ensure it provides adequate protection for the vulnerable and other Canadians as promised by the *Charter of Rights*, but I would suggest we start with two things:

1. By ensuring that palliative care is offered and available to patients before granting medical assistance in dying. It would be unconscionable to provide access to medical assistance in dying if we have not first provided medical assistance for living.
2. By reflecting in the legislation what the Supreme Court said, that "nothing... would compel physicians to provide assistance in dying." And this should include referrals.

The Trudeau government should be exercising strong leadership to ensure stringent safeguards on assisted dying, rather than dodging and deferring on almost every point. And these two amendments would be a good place to start.

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