



Testimony of Linda Waite-Simpson, Vermont State Director for Compassion & Choices prepared for VT Senate Health and Welfare Committee
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Good morning and thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Linda Waite-Simpson and I am Vermont State Director for Compassion & Choices, a national non-profit that works with individuals and organizations to make aid in dying an open and legally authorized option. We work with patients, physicians and caregivers to increase patient control and reduce unwanted interventions at the end of life.

I have had the honor of helping to implement Act 39 in Vermont and the law is working well. I have heard from many people who are thankful and who have said that it brings them great comfort to know that should suffering become unbearable, they have this option available to them. Physicians are starting to network amongst themselves and are generally respectful of their patients' end of life wishes.

Since the inception of Act 39 nearly 2 years ago, there have been no allegations of abuse or coercion. We had just 2 prescriptions written in the first year and have had 4 prescriptions written in the last 5 months. This, to me, points to the fact that there is no rush to encourage people to take this particular journey. In both OR and WA states, it took close to 5 years for full implementation and when fully implemented here, we should see about 15 or so prescriptions written each year.

My conversations with physicians indicates a very thoughtful approach to writing prescription under Act 39...it isn't a one and done interaction but rather an exploration of what the patient perceives their dying process will be like given the particulars of that person's disease. People are not afraid of death; they are afraid of the dying process. Physicians also indicate that although they can largely control pain, there are some diseases where they just can't get out in front of it. For those few (perhaps 1-3% of deaths), having access to a prescription to hasten their death is a great comfort.

Compassion & Choices' vision is consistent with the unique nature of the Vermont law: in 2016, the law converts to a completely private decision without state interference at all, also known as the sunset provision (among other things...). While there are still safeguards in place, the state would have no role in monitoring or overseeing the process. The new version of the law is consistent with the state's support of reproductive rights in that we honor the patient's decision and the physician's support without interference.

That said, it is my understanding that many people would like to see the law continue in its current form. If we need more time to establish best medical practices, then we should be thoughtful and patient for the time when we are comfortable and ready to step away from oversight. The main thing is to protect the law and we trust the legislature to make the right decision on this issue.