

Submission

on

Euthanasia

to the

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Re: Petition No 51 – Euthanasia

Hon Brian Ellis MLC

Chairman of Standing Committee of Environment and Public Affairs

Parliament House

PERTH WA 6000

SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Petition No 51 - Euthanasia

Preamble

As a Christian organisation affiliated with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) provides advice and leadership on social and political issues to the members of the nine Free Reformed Churches in WA, who together with other Free Reformed Churches across Australia have a membership approaching 4000 which have instituted and continue to maintain seven John Calvin Schools. ARPA is concerned with any changes in Australian laws which undermine the Christian foundations of our Australian society.

In writing this submission we use as our basis the Word of God because it sets out how we should serve our Creator and because we strongly believe that God provides for us, Christian and non-Christian alike, in His wisdom a practical example of how we need to live our lives.

If you would like to discuss this submission in more detail you can do so by contacting Royce Vermeulen on phone number 08 93901450, or email arpa@frca.org.au

Principally Opposed to Euthanasia

This submission outlines ARPA's general opposition to voluntary euthanasia because it is against the command of God who says in His Holy Word: "You shall not Murder" and we believe it supports and promotes a 'Culture of Death'.

The foundation of our objection to euthanasia is the fundamental belief that all people are made in the image of God. This important theological concept, called *Imago Dei*, is central to understanding the inherent dignity and worth of all human life, regardless of one's physical wellbeing or mental state. It is why Christians conscientiously work to preserve the sanctity of life.

Euthanasia puts at risk the lives of vulnerable patients because it transmits the overt message that some lives are not worth living. It encourages patients to seek death when a truly compassionate society would provide care and support to a person who is frail and in need. ARPA empathises with those who are suffering a terminal illness, but believes the right response to their suffering is to alleviate their pain through appropriate medical care and support.

Euthanasia Infringes the Inviolable Right to Life

Euthanasia infringes the inviolable right to life, as provided for in accepted international human rights instruments. It changes the relationship of the State to its most vulnerable citizens, relinquishing its responsibility to equally protect the lives of all its members. It forever alters the trusted relationship between medical practitioner and patient. Patients would no longer be assured that their doctor is always acting to protect their life.

Legalised euthanasia fails the objective of the law to primarily protect the weak and powerless. The supposed 'right to die' becomes the 'duty to die', as governments and families seek to become disencumbered of the financial cost and emotional burden of care.

Involuntary Euthanasia

There is no way to ensure that all cases of euthanasia are truly voluntary, and there is sufficient evidence to show that legalised voluntary euthanasia paves the way for the

practice of involuntary euthanasia. Supposed safeguards in euthanasia legislation, which are designed to protect vulnerable lives, have been clearly shown not to work. Of the seven patients who made formal use of the Northern Territory euthanasia law, three were 'socially isolated', and symptoms of depression were common¹.

Addressing End of Life Issues

Legalised euthanasia can too easily become the 'quick fix' method of addressing complex end of life care issues. The swift termination of life is, however, neither the solution of families wishing to be spared the grief of suffering, nor the administrative answer to problems of ageing demographics and budgetary constraints. It would be dangerous to determine matters of life and death by subjective judgements about the quality of life.

The appropriate first step in compassionately addressing complex end of life issues is to recognise the intrinsic value and worth of somebody who is suffering and dying. Society is educated and encouraged to value such lives when governments are committed to funding the provision of well-resourced and equitable palliative care services.

Implicit in the practice of euthanasia is the underlying concept that certain lives can be terminated because they are not of optimum quality, and hence, are of less value than others. ARPA opposes euthanasia due to this notion, which rejects the fundamental idea that all human life is inherently valuable.

Conclusion

ARPA also opposes euthanasia because its availability and incidence can be neither confined nor controlled, regardless of apparent 'safeguards'. Euthanasia has a range of alarming consequences, such as the inevitability of involuntary euthanasia, a forever changed doctor-patient relationship, and the acceptance of euthanasia as a cost-effective treatment option.

Therefore ARPA respectfully requests that in your investigation you ensure that Euthanasia continues to be prohibited in Western Australia, ensuring that those who do practice it or encourage it are dealt with according to law. Further we would encourage you to investigate the adequacy of funding to support people with terminal diseases in the end stages of their lives.

The request for this investigation is not a complaint and accordingly has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations – it is, however, a request.

¹ Kissane, D.W., Street, A., & Nitschke, P. (1998). Seven deaths in Darwin: Case studies under the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, Northern Territory, Australia. *The Lancet*, 352, 1097-1102