

## **Richard E Israel and Roger “Pip Moyer End-of-Life Option Act, SB-701 Support**

Testimony submitted by Barbara L Blaylock, M.D., February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Senate Judiciary Proceedings and Regulations Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of SB-701, which would enable physicians to provide terminally ill patients with a prescription that would enable them to exercise a measure of control in the timing and setting of their impending death in a manner that is painless and certain.

I am a 69-year-old retired primary care physician who has served in the trenches with patients and families through life-threatening illness and impending death. I have had more than one terminally ill patient implore me for some way to ensure if their pain or existential suffering became unbearable as death neared, they would be able to make one last decision to pass painlessly and with certainty at a time and in a place of their choice. As a primary care physician, I felt a responsibility to do whatever I could to relieve patients of their suffering and facilitate their autonomy and dignity. So, I felt I failed them when I had to tell them that I could not help them in this way.

I have heard the argument from opponents of this measure that doctors who help patients in this way are in violation of the Hippocratic Oath. I disagree. The Hippocratic Oath instructs physicians to avoid doing harm or administering a poison. I do not believe that prescribing medication that a terminally ill patient might decide to use to hasten the hour of his own death is the equivalent of “administering poison.” The medications used in this case are among those used to treat pain and suffering and induce sleep, in a dosage sufficient to induce a coma and then a painless death. Unlike poison, which causes illness, pain, or a death which would otherwise not occur, these medications provide relief from the suffering imposed by an illness that has already progressed to the point that death is certain. The underlying illness is the cause of death; the patient exercising the option to take what amounts to an overdose of pain-relieving and sleep-inducing medication in order to hasten the final event is merely exerting the only modicum of control left to him about its timing. And he, the patient, must administer the medication, should he decide to use it.

To those who say that allowing a patient to exercise an option to hasten his own death in the setting of a terminal condition is “immoral” or inconsistent with their religious beliefs, I say that forcing another person to undergo suffering he deems unbearable without relief, when relief could be made available, is immoral. The United States is a country in which the separation of church and state is a founding tenet. So, one person’s definition of “morality” or religious belief should not dictate another’s. This bill has numerous safeguards that ensure that a person seeking relief according to its guidelines is doing so with a sound mind and unwavering certainty, and that it is his own decision. No one else has the right, or is given authority by this proposed legislation, to force him to take this option. Likewise, no one else should have the right to deny it to him. Such an option is one that I hope will be available for myself when my own time comes.

Thank you for your time and attention.