



COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

Archbishop alarmed at erosion of respect for life

Report fails to reflect witnesses' call for palliative care, conscience rights

VANCOUVER (Feb. 25, 2016) – The leader of the Catholic community in the Lower Mainland called the joint Senate-Commons committee report on assisted-suicide “deeply disappointing.”

Archbishop J. Michael Miller said “Canadians, especially those dying or suffering from illness, deserve better. It’s alarming how easily suicide is being offered and respect for life eroded.”

Miller pointed out a serious omission in the report. “Where is the plan for protecting the Charter rights of Canadians who don’t want to participate in causing patients to die?” he asked. “Many health-care workers believe strongly in saving lives and ending suffering—but not in ending lives. Canadians from many ethical traditions just won’t be able to go along with this. Where is there room for them in medical care? No one can ethically be forced to take part in causing their patient to die. New laws need to ensure their Charter rights are protected as well.”

The Archbishop said he was troubled that the committee disregarded the testimony of so many witnesses who had called for conscience protection for health-care workers and institutions.

The report also fails to make palliative care the high priority many witnesses called for. “Unfortunately the report treats palliative care almost as an afterthought. It’s dismaying that a committee would propose assisted suicide as a ‘choice’ to people who are suffering. Without a real, effective, alternative, what kind of free choice is that?”

He said the committee appeared to have made its preference for assisted suicide clear from the start by choosing the euphemism “medical assistance in dying.” “Doctors have always assisted people who are dying,” he said. “What we are talking about here is medically causing the patient to die.”

He urged Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould to reject the report, to acknowledge the numerous sincere objections in the dissenting portion of the report, and to draft legislation taking into account the testimony of the many witnesses who brought forward concerns about implementing assisted suicide in Canada.

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