



## **Response by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the Recent Legislative decisions relative to Bill C-7**

Over the course of the past several months, there has been significant debate among Canadians over Bill C-7. Among the amendments that are being introduced, it seeks to expand access to euthanasia by eliminating the “reasonable foreseeability of natural death” criterion. This would allow those who are not dying to request and obtain euthanasia or assisted suicide in Canada.

The Catholic Bishops of Canada remain steadfastly opposed to all forms of euthanasia and assisted suicide. We are especially concerned by the accelerated and reckless pace in which the Government is attempting to pass Bill C-7. Despite the numerous warnings by disability organizations<sup>1</sup> and physicians<sup>2</sup> about the devastating consequences of Bill C-7, the truncated and flawed legislative process has overstepped legitimate democratic debate, while simply racing to meet a provincial court deadline rather than taking the time to deliberate fully the implications of Bill C-7. As demonstrated by a recent scientific poll conducted by the Angus Reid Group and Cardus, a majority of Canadians fear that the “*health care system will start to ignore long-term care and chronic disease in the elderly as MAiD becomes more available.*”<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the testimonies given at both the [House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights](#) and the [Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs](#), it became evidently clear there is no consensus in Canada on the proposed expansion of euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, despite the Government’s claim to the contrary in order to justify the passing of Bill C-7. Equally concerning is the delayed mandated parliamentary review on the impact of euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, and the state of palliative care, even though required by prior legislation. Even so, the Government remains intent on moving forward as quickly as possible to expand access to euthanasia and assisted suicide, based on its flawed and misleading online consultation conducted in January 2020 which failed to meet the standards of a scientific poll.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the aforementioned scientific poll conducted by Angus Reid and Cardus confirmed that a majority of Canadians have serious concerns and caveats with respect to the expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/humanrights/endoflife/Statement-Bill-C7>

<sup>2</sup> <https://maid2mad.ca/#DeclarationEnglish>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cardus.ca/news/news-releases/expanded-medical-assistance-in-dying-ignores-mainstream-concerns/>

<sup>4</sup> The consultation targeted one specific component of the legislation (“Eligibility Criteria”) and was intended to help the Government form its response to the Québec ruling in *Truchon*. The survey, however, never asked whether or not access to euthanasia/assisted-suicide (misleadingly labelled “medical assistance in dying”) should be expanded to include persons with disabilities, but simply assumed this. Instead, the survey concentrated on whether a person should be allowed to request euthanasia/assisted suicide by means of his or her own advance directives, or whether the Government’s current “safeguards” were sufficient to prevent abuse of or pressure on patients whose natural death is not reasonably foreseeable, such as individuals with mental health conditions or physical disabilities. The survey was instead based on the assumption that all Canadians were in favour of euthanasia and assisted suicide, and attempted to limit any expression of disagreement.

euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada.<sup>5</sup> In addition to overlooking such concerns among Canadians, the Government seems ready to dismiss and ignore the stark apprehensions brought forward even by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the implementation of “Medical Assistance in Dying” in Canada.<sup>6</sup>

A Bill that will adversely impact both individuals and society with such life and death matters deserves more time on the part of Canadians for listening and debate. The urgency and need for careful and cautious consideration have become even more evident in view of the weaknesses and fragilities which the global pandemic has exposed in our healthcare system, our social services, and the overall level of competent care available for the most vulnerable in our communities. The Catholic Bishops of Canada implore yet again our Canadian legislators to slow down this needless haste in legislating Bill C-7. Our first concern as a society must be the welfare and security of people, not arbitrary timelines imposed by the ruling of a lower provincial court. There is too much at stake. All Canadians wish to see that human suffering is adequately addressed with medical care in their time of need. However, to enable and assist in the suicide or the killing of another human being is never the answer or an appropriate response to human suffering. Assisted suicide and euthanasia is never simply an autonomous act or expression of an individual’s freedom. It ultimately has a destructive impact on the common good of a community. The dangers and warning signs are evident: in order for Canadians to arrive at such a moment in our history, it has required us to depart from Common Law as well as the Hippocratic Oath and to amend the Criminal Code. These represent a seismic shift in terms of how Canadians understand what it means to be human, to alleviate suffering, and to allow the moral principles of reason to be part of the foundation of a just society.

Joining our voices with so many other Canadians, we ask our legislators, both in the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada, to conscientiously rethink this current legislation and the amendments being considered in advance of the formal parliamentary review. This would demonstrate accountability and transparency, ensuring the trust that Canadians should have in their members of Parliament. It is not too late to reconsider Canada’s approach to euthanasia and assisted suicide, in order to ensure an ethical response, one that promotes the inherent dignity of each human person when faced with the profound questions surrounding what it means to be human, the quality of life, human suffering, death and dying. It is also imperative that the conscience rights of healthcare professionals be respected with regard to their decision not to provide or participate in the provision of “MAiD”. Many other Canadians have manifestly pointed to the grave lack of palliative care available across the country – a situation which needs to be addressed immediately. In addition to these concerns, there is a growing awareness of the need to give immediate attention to provisions that encompass mental health, home care, and social services so that the living conditions of persons with disabilities or chronic/ terminal illness can be improved.

We are encouraging the Catholic faithful of Canada, other religious communities, and all people of good will to become better informed on the content and grave moral implications of Bill C-7, and to address their objections and concerns directly to their local member of Parliament and the members of the Senate. A more in-depth analysis and appraisal of Bill C-7 can be found by

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cardus.ca/news/news-releases/expanded-medical-assistance-in-dying-ignores-mainstream-concerns/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24481&LangID=E>

reading the recent [CCCB submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.](#)<sup>7</sup>

Saint Joseph, patron of a happy death, of Canada, and of the Universal Church, we beseech your intercession in these difficult moments.

Executive Committee  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

18 December 2020

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CCCB-Submission-to-Stndng-Cmttee-Legal-and-Constitutional-Affairs-18-Nov-2020.pdf>