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**Testimony in strong opposition to HB 5326
An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients
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Senator Gerratana, Re. Johnson, and members of the Public Health Committee:

Movements are known by their mottoes. The civil rights movement sang "**We Shall Overcome.**" In the disability community, we have our own motto: "**Nothing About Us Without Us.**" We. Us. Interdependence. Community.

Compassion and Choices has its motto. It can be seen on their green stickers, multiple Facebook pages, and recently in the Capitol concourse: "**My Life. My Death. My Choice.**" Me. Myself. I. The difference is revealing.

That display in the concourse reduced a complex issue to a set of six-word slogans that could be seen by kids on school tours. Did Compassion and Choices care that mercilessly bullied autistic or LGBT teenagers would be exposed to messages proclaiming that "my death" is "my choice," with death by suicide the answer to suffering? No. They advocate rights without responsibilities, liberty without duty or obligation. It's all about themselves.

They don't care about all of the collateral damage assisted suicide legislation causes. They demand their "right to die" but will not defend our right to live—nor would they defend Barbara Wagner's and Randy Stroup's struggle to live. In November 2008, Compassion and Choices president Barbara Coombs Lee wrote an op-ed in *The Oregonian* chillingly defending Oregon Medicaid's refusal to pay for potentially life-prolonging chemotherapy while offering instead to pay roughly \$100 for suicide drugs. As a former HMO executive, she had a keen interest in rationing healthcare for the bottom line—the selfish interest of her corporation. Compassion and Choices will not defend your choice to have aggressive treatment. So we see it is about neither compassion nor choice—not **your** choice, only **their** choice.

They don't care that under HB 5326, a misdiagnosis or incorrect prognosis can become a death sentence cutting lives short by years, even decades. Mickey MacIntyre's claim in the *New Haven Register* that "It's not suicide; people are already dying" is patently false. The late Senator Ted Kennedy was given just 2-4 months to live, yet lived 15 productive months. Jeanette Hall, diagnosed with cancer and given six months to a year to live, sought to die under Oregon's assisted suicide law. Her doctor persuaded her to accept treatment, and she is alive and well nearly 14 years later. John

Norton was diagnosed with ALS at age 18 and given 3-5 years to live. Six years later, the progression of his disease suddenly stopped and he is alive at age 76, with a wife, children, and retired from a successful career. He writes that if assisted suicide had been legal at the time, "I would have taken that opportunity."

They don't care that HB 5326 is a prescription for elder abuse on a massive scale. Tami Sawyer was convicted of defrauding the estate of Thomas Middleton, who died under Oregon's assisted suicide law the same month he moved into Sawyer's home. Was it fraud, or homicide as well? Because no law legalizing assisted suicide requires independent witnesses at the time of death, we will never know for sure. And we will never know how many others died under suspicious circumstances. The law protects greedy heirs and Compassion and Choices simply doesn't care.

They don't care that under HB 5326, family members can be kept in the dark about a relative's assisted suicide. What if your parent or spouse were to ingest a lethal prescription and you had no idea this was coming? Ordinary suicide devastates unsuspecting relatives; the same can be true for "aid-in-dying" suicide. When it is "**my** choice" to "**my** death," widows and orphans do not matter, family and community do not matter. It's all about **me**.

They don't care about truth. Referring to the issue of suicide contagion, Rep. Betsy Ritter is quoted in the *Yale Daily News* saying "her research team found no rise in states that have right-to-die laws." But according to the Centers for Disease Control, Oregon's already high suicide rate has increased much faster than the national average from 1999 through 2010—49% versus 28% for ages 35-64. When your focus is so heavily on **me**, **myself**, and **I**, facts do not seem to matter. They just do not care.

And when it is all about "my choice" to "my death," expansion is the goal. During the last few months, Compassion and Choices has sponsored multiple Connecticut showings of "The Last Campaign of Governor Booth Gardner." Gardner advocated suicide assistance for anyone whose suffering is deemed unbearable, while accepting an incrementalist strategy to get there. Just look at their green stickers: **My** Life. **My** Death. **My** Choice. Nothing here about limiting assisted death to people in their last days.

Let us not sink to the level of a self-centered movement that appeals to our basest instincts, especially our fear of disability as we grow older. Progressives in particular should fear and loathe this prejudice and the discrimination it entails. Instead, let us hearken to the call to conscience. Reject Compassion and Choices and HB 5326, which have far more in common with the selfishness of Ayn Rand than the dream of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We Shall Overcome!

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Marisa Lindsey, Compassion and Choices CT, "Free movie at Milford Public Library" January 12, 2014 http://stratford.patch.com/groups/opinion/p/free-movie-at-milford-public-library_a5c89b37 "[Gardner's] message, which we will discuss after the film, is simple: **Society must honor freedom of choice at all stages of life.**"—implying a right to suicide assistance on demand.

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