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Hello. My name is Kate Ryan. I am here today to urge you to vote against HR 1998.

One of my main reasons for opposing this bill is that I do not think that people necessarily are aware of their able-bodied, neurotypical privilege. They think that since they have never encountered discrimination in their lives, that people with disabilities haven’t, either. This is simply not true. Discrimination can be both overt and very subtle. Society pushes messages at people all the time, and one of the main messages that people with disabilities get is that you aren’t worthy.

When I was growing up with an undiagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder, I had a year where I frequently complained of stomach pain. Since there was no physical reason for my pain, I was told the story of the Boy Who Cried Wolf. What I got out of this story was that people would like you more if you didn’t complain. You should always say yes, say that you understand even when you don’t, and put others needs ahead of your own.

There is no such place as a vacuum. When physician-assisted suicide is presented to a person with a disability, they are not just making a simple choice to live or to die. They are also being pressured by society, by their family and friends, and by medical providers, to admit that their life is not worth living. People with disabilities live every day having to prove that we deserve basic human rights. Maybe it is my developmental disability, but I just don’t understand why people without disabilities are given suicide prevention materials yet people with disabilities are urged to sign DNR’s.

Every disability is different. Six months is an incredibly arbitrary timeline. I know a wonderful girl who is fourteen years old. She was not supposed to live past two. She is incredibly happy and well loved. She brings joy to everyone who knows her. She has many significant disabilities and health problems but nobody who knows her wishes that she hadn’t been given the best of care.

When people in Oregon choose physician assisted suicide, they rarely cite pain as a reason. Instead, the top five are loss of autonomy, dignity, control of bodily functions, being unable to do activities and feeling like a burden. These are not medical problems. They are societal problems. They are, moreover, societal problems that can be fixed. It is indeed possible to live a very full life with significant disabilities. But you can’t do that unless you are living.