

State of Utah Legislature

House Health and Human Services Standing Committee

July 13, 2016 Hearing

1:15 pm

Vote No on HB 264 – Assisted Suicide Legislation

From Dr. Kenneth R. Stevens, Jr. MD, Radiation Oncologist,
Professor Emeritus and former Department Chair, Radiation Oncology
Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon
President, Physicians for Compassionate Care Education Foundation www.pccef.org

Dear Rep. Raymond P. Ward:

1. I strongly urge you to Vote No on HB 264, which seeks to legalize physician assisted suicide in Utah.

I am a cancer doctor in Oregon, where physician-assisted suicide is legal. I was also raised in Logan, graduated from USU, and received my MD from the University of Utah Medical School 50 years ago. I am Professor Emeritus and former chair of the Department of Radiation Oncology at Oregon Health and Science University. I regularly visit Utah. I continue to practice in my cancer medical specialty.

2. Vote No because legalizing assisted suicide destroys the trust between patient and doctor

My Personal Story

I first became involved with assisted-suicide in 1982, shortly before my first wife, Shannon Kramer Stevens (daughter of Dick Kramer, Bonneville Golf Course 50-year Pro and Legend) , died of cancer. We had just made what would be her last visit with her doctor. As we were leaving the office, he said that he could provide her with an extra-large dose of pain medication. As I helped her to the car, she said “Ken, he wants me to kill myself.”

It devastated her that her doctor, her trusted doctor, would suggest that she kill herself. It really troubled her. Within two weeks, she died peacefully in our home. I learned then how assisted suicide destroys the trust between patient and doctor. Patients want support from their doctors, not encouragement to commit suicide.

3. Vote No to save lives

Photo of me and my patient Jeanette Hall, 15 years after I talked her out of assisted suicide in Oregon



In 2000, Jeanette Hall was my cancer patient. At our first meeting, Jeanette told me that she did not want to be treated, and that she was going to “do” our law, i.e., kill herself with a lethal dose of barbiturates. She had previously voted in favor of the law, and that was what she had decided. I informed her that her cancer was treatable and her prospects were good. She was not interested in treatment; she had made up her mind for the assisted suicide.

Her surgeon had previously informed her that without cancer treatment, she had only six months to a year to live, making her eligible for Oregon’s law. I asked her to return for weekly visits. On the third or fourth visit, I asked her about her family and learned that she had a son. I asked her how he would feel about her plan. A short time later she decided to be treated.

Five years later, Jeanette and I happened to be in the same restaurant. Excitedly, she came over to my table exclaiming, “Dr. Stevens you saved my life.”

For Jeanette, the mere presence of legal assisted suicide had steered her to suicide. She has now told me repeatedly that if I had believed in assisted suicide, she would be dead.

I urge you to vote No to save lives.

In Summary,

- 1. I strongly urge you to Vote No on HB 264, which seeks to legalize physician assisted suicide in Utah.**
- 2. Vote No because legalizing assisted suicide destroys the trust between patient and doctor**
- 3. Vote No to save lives**

I have much additional information regarding significant problems in Oregon due to assisted suicide legalization. I am happy to provide that information to you at a later time.

Very sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth R. Stevens, Jr., MD
Sherwood, OR