

## **Open Letter from Leaders of Disabled People's Movement in UK and USA**

Dear Sir,

As leaders of the disabled people's movement in the UK and the USA, we are extremely concerned about how the proposed amendment to the Coroners and Justice Bill will impact on the lives of disabled people.

If Lord Falconer's amendment succeeds in the House of Lords on Tuesday 7 July then those who assist 'terminally ill' people to go abroad to end their lives in 'suicide clinics' would be immune from prosecution. The phrase 'terminally ill' is not defined in the amendment, and could apply to people with a very wide range of chronic progressive illnesses some with life expectancy stretching to decades.

Disabled people who experience progressive conditions understand far more than non-disabled people about what it is like to live with these pressures. We know what is acceptable as disease or disability progresses, and for the huge number of us who say no to assisted suicide, it is because we fear the changing culture such an amendment would bring. People without experience of disability, including our friends and families cannot predict what each stage of our personal journey will mean. Furthermore, financial and emotional conflicts of interest will always present an added burden to the situation. A law decriminalising assisted suicide would undoubtedly place disabled people under pressure to end their lives early to relieve the burden on relatives, carers or the state.

These concerns are not side issues that only affect disabled people. We are like society's 'canaries in the coalmine' who can often see the dangers of potentially discriminatory legislation before others, as it impacts on us even before the deed is done. We are scared now; we will be terrified if assisted suicide becomes state-sanctioned.

The existing law, with the penalties it holds in reserve, causes potential assisters and those wishing to die, to think very carefully before acting. The discretion within the current law enables judges to exercise compassion in hard cases. What is not broken does not need fixing.

Disabled people have been largely silent in this debate which has been carried out in the media by clerics, non-disabled commentators and a small handful of individuals with terminal conditions who are supported by Dignity in Dying. Until people like us are present to engage in this highly complex and ethical debate, we must strongly oppose any device such as Lord Falconer's amendment to get assisted dying in through the back door.

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton  
Crossbench Peer

Liz Sayce  
CEO, RADAR

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Chair, United Kingdom Disabled People's Council (UKDPC)

David Morris  
Chair of Independent Living Alternatives

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