

Rabbi Elias Lieberman
Testimony for the
Joint Public Health Committee
House Hon. Chair Kate Hogan
and Senate Chair Hon. Jason Lewis and Committee Members
on
The Compassionate Care for the Terminally Ill Act
October 27, 2015

My name is Elias Lieberman and I serve as the rabbi of the Falmouth Jewish Congregation on Cape Cod, a position I have held for the past twenty-five years. I am grateful for the opportunity to offer testimony today in support of The Compassionate Care for the Terminally Ill Act.

I have, in the past, served as a hospice chaplain and I bring to this moment decades of experience serving the needs of families as they contend with end of life issues. I have been witness to good deaths and bad deaths; I have seen members of my community pass from life serenely and I have watched them endure suffering that none of us would wish for ourselves or anyone we love.

In Jewish tradition, a frequently heard toast is “*L’chayim*”, a Hebrew expression that means “To life”. In truth, mine is a faith tradition that deems precious the gift of life we are granted. But mine is also a tradition that rejects the notion that there is anything inherently redemptive about suffering.

The wisdom found in the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that “there is a time to be born and a time to die.” I have come to believe that there is, sometimes, a time for an individual to make the informed decision to bring his/her life to an end with compassionate support and with the safeguards incorporated into this proposed legislation.

As a person of faith and as someone who chose a profession in which I am expected to offer guidance and support to those facing the ultimate in existential questions, I believe firmly that every individual should be afforded the right to end life when suffering renders living intolerable.

I believe that life must be infused with meaning and purpose and when it is no longer possible for us to attain either, because of the suffering induced by illness, a compassionate alternative must be available to us, one that lies at the core of this proposed legislation.

I do not presume to speak for all Jews or for Judaism; I do presume to offer my experience and my convictions gained over the course of my career ministering to the dying and to their loved ones. I urge you to grant the precious gift of autonomy to those whose suffering will be unendurable and for whom a release from a life of suffering would be the greatest of blessings.

Submitted by:

Rabbi Elias Lieberman
Falmouth Jewish Congregation
7 Hatchville Road
East Falmouth, MA 02536
rebelias@comcast.net
508-540-0602

