

20th December 2021

Liam McArthur MSP
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr McArthur

**ASSISTED DYING FOR TERMINALLY ILL ADULTS (SCOTLAND) BILL - REPRESENTATION FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF INDEPENDENT EVANGELICAL CHURCHES (SCOTLAND).**

Response to question one - *NEUTRAL*

The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) represents 32 churches throughout Scotland with over 1500 members in total. Additionally FIEC represents a range of other Scottish church leaders and pastors affiliated to our 'Pastors' Network'. In the United Kingdom as a whole FIEC is made up of 630 churches and exists to support independent churches and represent them across the four nations.

As a significant church grouping representing many Scottish citizens we wish to express our deep concerns about the proposed 'Assisted Dying' (Scotland) Bill. We believe that the proposals in this Bill to allow the intentional and proactive taking of human life on the grounds of health is a hugely dangerous step.

First-hand pastoral care

As churches and pastors we are often deeply involved, and witnesses to, situations of great suffering and human tragedy. We are very conscious and sensitive to the pressures, heartache and pain that people face at such times – both those directly afflicted and those close to them.

In such circumstances people need the greatest care and support that society can provide. The provision of pain relieving medication and other palliative care by the NHS and other care providers is something we are deeply thankful for. It's funding and provision is a mark of a caring society.

Medical ethics

Our society has been greatly blessed and well served by an ethical commitment that medicine and medics should only ever be employed to sustain and protect human life. Such care, of course, is demanding and can be costly but it is a mark of a safe and equitable society that every human life (regardless of its condition) should be regarded as sacrosanct.

State power

We believe that for the State to sanction and become involved in the proactive taking of life on the basis of its perceived 'value' or 'quality' would be to fundamentally change the balance of power between citizens and government. Government, we believe, should never countenance any involvement in the killing of any of its citizens on such a basis. We realise there will inevitably be cases

that will test such a principle due to their harrowing nature – nevertheless it is a principle that once overturned will inevitably lay the basis for Government to involve itself in further pragmatic extensions.

Indeed it would be highly naïve to think that this proposed Bill, if passed, would not in time lead to wider applications. The issue of Abortion is a case in point: the legislation for this was introduced with assurances that it would be a measure only for the most desperate cases and would be rigorously monitored and controlled. Yet in 2020 over 13,815 abortions were performed in Scotland¹ (209,917 in England and Wales²). Regarding 'Assisted Dying' (euthanasia) it is clear that where this has been allowed elsewhere the result is increasing and widening use over time – such as the increase of deaths, in the Netherlands, due to euthanasia rising from 1.9% in 1990 to 4.4% in 2017³.

Public Opinion

We note figures in the consultation proposal indicating very high levels of public support for 'Assisted Dying'⁴. Such high levels of support were, of course, also true in previous years for the Death Penalty. Yet despite that, elected officials saw a bigger picture and principles (e.g. the imperative to safeguard citizens from irreversible misjudgements) and thus held out against a popular but potentially treacherous policy.

Pressures on the most vulnerable

We are also concerned that 'Assisted Dying' would, over time, create cultural pressure on some of the most vulnerable people in society. Legislating for people to prematurely terminate their life can only shift the dynamic to a situation in which choosing to live becomes as much of a choice as choosing to die. In such a situation it is not hard to see how vulnerable people could begin to feel, or indeed be made to feel, that they are being selfish by continuing to live (and thus being a 'burden' on others).

We note this is the third time in under a decade that such measures have been brought forward, it would seem strange to think that the moral and pragmatic reasons that compelled the previous rejections would have changed in such a short space of time. For all these reasons (and many others outlined elsewhere⁵) we would ask that you withdraw these proposals.

Yours faithfully,

¹ <https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/termination-of-pregnancy-statistics/termination-of-pregnancy-statistics-year-ending-december-2020/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/10/record-number-of-women-in-england-and-wales-had-abortions-in-2020>

³ <https://spcare.bmj.com/content/early/2021/09/26/bmjspcare-2020-002573>

⁴ <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/proposed-members-bills/assisted-dying-for-terminally-ill-adults-scotland-consultation-2021-final.pdf> - p12

⁵ https://care.org.uk/cause/assisted-suicide/arguments-for-and-against-assisted-suicide-and-euthanasia?gclid=CjoKCOiA8ICOBhDmARIsAEGl6o1yT9xbu3kSMWpBomYpa5VrjudyLzWyPEk3cWN7PmPr3TdPV2KaoU4aAhENEALw_wcB