

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members:

My name is Peter Bangs¹ and I would like to first disclose that I am a state employee, but I am taking leave today to share my personal opinions in support of House Bill 99.

I would like to briefly describe two contrasting experiences that have helped shaped my beliefs on this issue. Several years ago, my wife's grandmother, Helen, was severely injured in an accident. Her doctors told us in no uncertain terms that she was dying from her injuries, but that it could take a few weeks. Unfortunately, they were not able to keep her comfortable. Helen had always been a remarkably strong and tough woman, but she was in so much pain and suffering that she kept telling her care givers that it was time and that she begged them to let her go. In an effort to speed up the process, she refused to eat, drink, or take her medications.

In contrast, my wife and I recently lost two dogs – one to cancer and another to liver disease. For each of them, we made the decision to put them to sleep after exhausting treatment options and when they were no longer comfortable. As much as we hated to let them go, I am grateful that we had the option to end to their needless suffering. When it comes to people, I don't understand why we can't provide our loved ones with the same freedom to die with dignity and compassion as we do for our companion animals.

This is an issue about allowing people to make their own decisions according to their own desires and beliefs. To put this issue in perspective, consider that Alaska allows 19 year old kids to decide whether to use tobacco, even though tobacco products cause cancer and premature deaths for hundreds of thousands of people in the US each year. One of the main reasons that tobacco - and now marijuana - is legal is because Alaskans value the right to make their own decisions, even if you or I don't agree with their choices. That is exactly what HB 99 is all about – empowering terminally ill people with the right to die on their own terms according to their own desires and beliefs – not yours or mine. Thank you.

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