

Seeback condemns Bill C-7, wants improved palliative care funding

Written By MIKE BAKER

Dufferin-Caledon MP Kyle Seeback has criticized the Liberal federal government for attempting to fast-track legislation that would change assisted-dying rules across Canada.

Late last month (on Feb. 24), Bill C-7, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), was tabled by Justice Minister David Lametti and Patty Hadju, Canada's Minister of Health. The proposed legislation repeals a requirement that a patient's death must be 'reasonably foreseeable', but still requires patients to have a 'grievous and irremediable medical condition'.

'If we have a mandated review of the legislation scheduled in June, what is the rush?' Mr. Seeback asked in the Commons. 'My understanding is that there was only about two weeks of public consultation for this legislation. In my opinion, that is woefully deficient, given the gravity of the topic.'

The government bill is in response to the current law's requirement that a natural death must be 'reasonably foreseeable' or 'incurable', which limits the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada ruling mandating assisted dying be made available to all adults with 'grievous and irremediable' medical conditions. The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association challenged the constitutionality of the current law because it excludes people with long-term disabilities, and those with 'curable' medical conditions whose only treatment options people may find unacceptable. The BCCLA argues these medical conditions should qualify under the court's definition of 'grievous and irremediable'.

The government's move follows hot on the heels of a decision by a Quebec Superior Court judge on Sept. 11, 2019, that it was unconstitutional to limit access to MAID to people nearing the end of their life. That ruling came into effect yesterday (March 11).

While he made his feelings known regarding Bill C-7, Mr. Seeback also condemned the Liberals for what he perceives to be a blasé approach at the federal level to palliative care services.

'The minister (Mrs. Hadju) has made comments in the House (on Feb. 27) espousing the great investments that are being made by the government in health care, but has not really talked about any specific investments with respect to palliative care.'

Mr. Seeback reminded the House, and Minister Hadju, that Bill C-277, legislation that would call for the development of a framework on palliative care across Canada, was passed by the previous Liberal government in 2017. Thus far, there has been little movement on that Bill. Included within that proposed legislation, Mr. Seeback explained, was a note that states a request for physician-assisted death cannot be truly voluntary if the option of proper palliative care is not available to alleviate a person's suffering.

'This was passed by Parliament, so if we are looking to expand the scope of medically assisted death without also expanding the availability of palliative care, we are doing an incredible disservice to Canadians, because the availability of palliative care in this country is poor at best,' Mr. Seeback said.

He went on to reference his own personal experiences with the limited availability of palliative care resources when both of his parents were suffering with terminal illness. Mr. Seeback speculated that, for individuals who cannot access palliative care, a medically assisted death may appear as a far more attractive option 'a feeling he strongly believes the federal government should be working to quash.

'When people do not have the option for proper palliative care, their consent for a medically assisted death is significantly in question. I am extraordinarily concerned by the lack of any plan, by the government, to deal with investments in palliative care,' Mr.

Seeback said.

Locally, both Hospice Dufferin and Bethell Hospice currently operate in our region. Bethell Hospice, located in Caledon, is a live-in facility with access to 10 beds, which Mr. Seeback notes is supposed to service a population of approximately 130,000 people. Hospice Dufferin operates programs out of the Edelbrock Centre in Orangeville, while also providing homecare services across the County. Both entities are responsible for fund-raising the vast majority of their annual budget.