

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) represents 18 churches throughout Scotland with over 1000 members in total. In addition FIEC represents a number of other Scottish church leaders and pastors affiliated to our 'Pastors' Network'. In the United Kingdom as a whole FIEC is made up of over 500 churches and exists to support independent churches and represent them at national levels.

As a significant church grouping representing many Scottish citizens we wish to express our deep concerns about the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill currently under consideration by the Health and Sport Committee. 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.

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. It is in such circumstances that people need the greatest care and support; the provision of pain relieving medication and other palliative care by the NHS and other care providers is something we are deeply thankful for, and whose funding and provision by government is a mark of a caring society.

Indeed it is at the very heart of our society's ethics that medicine and medics should only ever be employed to sustain and protect human life (we note in this regard opposition to this legislation by many parts of the medical profession). Such care, of course, is demanding and can be costly but it is a mark of civilised society that every human life should be cherished (regardless of its condition) as of utmost value.

We believe that for the State to sanction the 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 hold it as sacrosanct never to countenance any involvement in the killing of any of its citizens on such a basis. We realise that 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 result in demands for further pragmatic extensions.

Indeed it would be highly naïve to think this legislation 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. Last year over 12,000 abortionsⁱⁱ were performed in Scotland (over 190,000 in England and Wales in 2012ⁱⁱⁱ). Regarding Assisted Suicide it is clear that where provision has been allowed elsewhere the trend is one of increasing and widening use over time – such as the recent extension of such provision

in Belgium to include children^{iv}.

We are also concerned that Assisted Suicide provision would, over time, create cultural pressure on the most vulnerable in our society to end their life rather than be a perceived burden on others. Legislating for people to commit suicide shifts the dynamic, for those suffering, from a situation in which choosing to live would be as much a choice as choosing to die – in such a situation it is not hard to see how people could begin to feel (or be made to feel) they are choosing to be a ‘burden’ and thus being selfish by continuing to live.

A number of other arguments against Assisted Suicide have been cogently made by The Christian Institute and Care Not Killing which we would share and support.

For all these reasons we ask that the Committee reject this Bill, and in doing so uphold the moral foundation of Government (and indeed medicine) in only ever seeking to sustain and protect the lives of its citizens. We appreciate that this will be hard for some, with whom we would want to stand, to support and to pray for, but believe that there is a greater principle at stake concerning the very sanctity of life.

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ⁱ <http://bma.org.uk/practical-support-at-work/ethics/bma-policy-assisted-dying>

ⁱⁱⁱⁱⁱ <https://isdscotland.scot.nhs.uk/Health-Topics/Sexual-Health/Publications/2013-05-28/2013-05-28-Abortions-Summary.pdf?72820681334>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211790/2012_Abortion_Statistics.pdf

^{iv} <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26181615>