

## Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

### Friends At The End {FATE}

1. Do you agree with the general purpose of the Bill to make it permissible, in the circumstances provided for, to assist another to commit suicide?

Yes.

As a result of intolerable suffering due to physical disease, it is undeniable that some individuals wish to calmly and rationally bring their lives to an end. Some are able to achieve this, but a few are unable to carry that out by themselves and require assistance to do so. The general purpose of the Bill represents a humane and compassionate response to that need.

2. Do you have any views on how the provisions in this Bill compare with those from the previous End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill?

The process is more stringent than was previously the case. The three stages with their respective time limits and the endorsement of medical practitioners on four separate occasions strengthen the safeguards for the vulnerable, as does the role of the licensed facilitator.

3. The Bill precludes any criminal and civil liability for those providing assistance, providing the processes and requirements set out in the Bill have been adhered to. Do you wish to make any comment on this?

The purpose of the Bill is to define the circumstances in which individuals can legally obtain support to end their lives. Decriminalising such acts and the removal of civil liability are implicit in that objective.

4. The Bill outlines a three stage declaration and request process that would be required to be followed by an individual seeking assisted suicide. Do you have any comment on the process being proposed?

The Preliminary Declaration makes it clear that there would be a need to opt-in to the process. As a consequence, individuals who would never seek assistance to commit suicide, no matter the circumstances, can be reassured that the provisions of the Bill would not apply to them.

The two Request Stages, with their corresponding "cooling off" periods, provide a safeguard against any impulsive actions. Experience from elsewhere in the world suggests that a significant proportion of those seeking assistance would drop-out at each stage, yet obtain comfort from remaining in control of their lives.

5. Do you have any comment on the provisions requiring that the person seeking assisted suicide must have a terminal or life-shortening illness, or a progressive condition which is either terminal or life-shortening?

The difference that is drawn between the terms "illness" and "condition" is confusing.

Making it clear that a diagnosis per se would not allow an individual to proceed to Stages 2 and 3 is laudable, but the use of the above terms is not helpful.

6. Are you satisfied with the eligibility requirements as regards age, capacity, and connection with Scotland as set out in the Bill?

Yes.

7. Do you have any comment on the roles of medical practitioners and pharmacists as provided for in the Bill?

During the preliminary consultation stage of the Bill, the Royal College of General Practitioners in Scotland decided that it would be inappropriate to take a stance either for or against the Bill. This position was adopted after a national survey of members showed a wide range of views. It is likely that would translate into some doctors co-operating with the process and others being unwilling to do so. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society in Scotland and Community Pharmacy Scotland take a similar view.

8. Do you have any comment on the means by which a person would be permitted to end his/her life under the Bill?

These means should be known to be effective and to be capable of achieving the desired end rapidly, without causing pain or discomfort. A liquid barbiturate is likely to be the preferred agent.

9. Do you have any comment on the role of licensed facilitators provided for in the Bill?

The proposed licensed facilitator is to be welcomed. It offers additional protection for the vulnerable. It may be worthwhile enhancing their involvement. For example, the facilitator could be given authority to check that all necessary steps had been properly observed; that records were kept and centrally recorded. Provision for those could come under Section 23 (1) of the Bill, where Scottish Ministers may issue directions about how licensed facilitators are to act.

It would then be useful to keep and publish a statistical account of the process. Amongst other items, that could include a record of the numbers of individuals obtaining a prescription and the numbers who ultimately consumed the drug. Facilitators could be responsible for gathering this information.

10. Do you have any comment on the role of the police as provided for in the Bill?

No

11. Do you have any comment to make about the Bill not already covered in your answers to the questions above?

Over many years FATE has gained considerable experience in dealing with persons who are intent on taking their own lives. Not infrequently that has resulted in referrals

being made to organisations which seek to prevent suicide, such as the Samaritans. However, FATE is also aware of a number of sane individuals who have travelled to Switzerland to obtain an assisted suicide, while a few have taken steps to achieve the same result in this country. While the numbers who do so are not large, inquiries continue to be received.

It is clear to us that there is a need for this assistance to be provided in Scotland. To compel such persons to travel elsewhere, or to risk forcing them into taking violent measures in this country, is both immoral and cruel. The provisions contained within the Bill are to be welcomed.

We would welcome the opportunity of giving oral evidence to the Committee in due course.

**Friends At The End {FATE}**