



Healthcare Association
of Hawaii

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Representative Eric Hamakawa, Chair

Capitol Auditorium
Thursday, March 4, 2004 at 9:00 a.m.

Testimony in opposition to HB 862.

I am Rich Meiers, President and CEO of the Healthcare Association of Hawaii, which represents the entire spectrum of health care, including acute care hospitals, two-thirds of the long term care beds in Hawaii, as well as home care and hospice providers. I regret that I shall not be able to present testimony in person because I am attending a conference on the mainland. However, I appreciate this opportunity to submit written testimony in strong opposition to HB 862, which provides the statutory authority for physician-assisted suicide.

This bill threatens the moral foundation of our society. As young children, we are taught not to harm others. This basic principle allows us to live together with others in society, and it remains with us throughout our lives. Those who do not adhere to it are separated from the larger society by being incarcerated. There are religious teachings that prohibit the taking of human life, and the secular traditions are just as strong. Our society simply would not be able to function as well as it does if human life were not given the highest standing. Assisted suicide contradicts this fundamental value.

It should be noted that the Healthcare Association does not oppose efforts that allow people to die, such as a person's decision to have life-sustaining treatment withdrawn in accordance with a living will. However, there is a crucial difference between this type of passive effort and actively promoting death, which is tantamount to killing.

Many physicians strongly oppose physician-assisted suicide on the basis of the historical ethical traditions of medicine. For example, the Hippocratic oath states, "I will not administer poison to anyone where asked," and "Be of benefit, or at least do no harm." Physician-assisted suicide would undermine the integrity of the medical profession.

There may be an interest in these bills because end-of-life care may not have been adequate in some cases. Instead of taking the drastic step of allowing physician-assisted suicide, we instead suggest an improvement in end-of-life care. For example, hospice care can be extended to more people, for longer periods of time if necessary. Hospice enables people to be cared for within their families, surrounded by professional, compassionate caregivers. In addition, adequate pain medication can be provided to those in need. We acknowledge that medical personnel should have more continuing education about the variety of drugs that are available to reduce pain. In short, there are other steps that are more humane which can be taken instead of physician-assisted suicide.

For the foregoing reasons, the Healthcare Association of Hawaii strongly opposes HB 862.