

Ottawa, January 19th, 2006

Dear Mr. Schadenberg:

On behalf of Gilles Duceppe, MP for Laurier–Sainte-Marie and leader of the Bloc Québécois, I want to thank you for your email of January 17th, 2006.

We appreciate the fact that you took the time to share with us your opposition to Bill C-407, on the right to die with dignity.

In our view, however, everyone has the right to make decisions about the health care they want to receive, and to expect that their decisions about their own body will be carried out. People should be able to choose freely to die if it is clear to them that they no longer have any quality of life and that their suffering has become intolerable.

For some people, prolonging life involves a loss of independence and control, which in turns means a loss of dignity that they cannot accept. We have a moral obligation to respect the preferences of such people, in such circumstances, as to when and how they wish to die.

The right to kill oneself is recognized in Canadian law, which permits an individual who is physically capable of it to commit suicide. But a person who is not physically capable of it has no right to receive help when such help involves the administration of a medical procedure. While the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equality for all, we have here a form of discrimination against people with certain disabilities.

What is more, assisted suicide in secret is not uncommon. Some patients have the good fortune to obtain the help of a doctor, and everything goes smoothly. But there have been cases where no doctor has been available or willing, and the attempted suicide has failed, involving horrible suffering both for the patient and for those around him. Legalizing assisted suicide would put a stop to this kind of situation.

As it happens, a majority of Canadians are in favour of legalizing assisted suicide. In 1995, 75% of respondents answered Yes to the following question: “If someone is suffering from an incurable illness, and suffering severe pain, do you think that the law should allow competent doctors to euthanize that patient if the patient formally requests this in writing?”

Lastly, other countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium have already legalized assisted suicide, with a strict legislative framework around the practice. Foreign experience shows that the legalization of assisted suicide works well and has not led to a proliferation of requests for assistance in dying.

Please rest assured that the Bloc Québécois will continue to take a responsible approach and act at all times with respect for the Canadian people.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nadine Charbonneau". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and a long, sweeping tail.

Nadine Charbonneau
For Marie Bourgeois
Correspondence Coordinator