

Rev. Cedric A. Harmon
Testimony on Death with Dignity Act, Bill 21-38
Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
July 10, 2015

Good morning.

I am Reverend Cedric A. Harmon and I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony as a Christian minister who is supportive of the Death with Dignity Act of 2015. This bill will give terminally ill, mentally competent adults the option to end needless suffering by requesting a prescription from a physician.

Such compassionate and reassuring choice at the end of life has been available in states like Oregon for over 17 years with not one documented case of abuse or coercion.

As a faith leader, I know families and friends want a peaceful passing for their loved ones instead of being haunted by images of deterioration and pain. I would support a parishioner who may choose this option when they are facing a terminal illness with the prognosis of it ending in terrible suffering. A colleague in ministry has said it very well, "When dying persons have alternatives a final measure of control they feel a sense of comfort and peace that allows them to truly live during their last days. This is the greatest gift we can grant our dying friends and loved ones."

I sincerely believe individuals, in accordance with their own value system, should have access to this option along with the choice spectrum for end of life decision-making (from hospice, to palliative care to death with dignity). Seven out of 10 Americans (69%) think that doctors should be allowed by law to end the life of a patient who has a disease that cannot be cured "by some painless means if the patient and his or her family request it."

It is my hope that the legislation will become law so that those at the end of life will be able to make a choice consistent with their religious and spiritual beliefs and their understanding of what is life and what is death.

Thank you, Councilmember Alexander, for convening hearings on this important measure in the interest of the citizens of the District of Columbia.