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Hon. Edward O'Donohue MLC
Chair,
Legal and Social Issues Committee,
Parliament House
Spring Street
Melbourne
VIC 3002.

28th July 2015

Dear Hon. O'Donohue MLC,

In Support of Legalising Euthanasia in Victoria

We are the Progressive Atheists (Inc.) – a group of activist working for social justice. The aim of this brief submission is to express our support for legalising euthanasia. By expressing such support, we do not intend to belittle the moral gravity of the matter of euthanasia (or suicide or any voluntary or involuntary ending of life), but rather, we intend to support the right of informed and consenting individuals to end their lives, at a time of their own choosing.

We acknowledge that this task is immense, in that on the one hand, we want people to choose their own time of death, but on the other hand, we do not want the criteria to be so broad as to institute State-subsidised suicide. But we believe that in cases where the people are elderly, and/or in severe irreversible pain, and/or facing potential indignity, clearly, the autonomy of the patient must prevail.

Now in saying so, we acknowledge that there is the ironic danger that people may be tempted or pressured into dying, by the institutions, persons and/or families that surround them, who may stand

to benefit from their demise. By saying so, we are merely highlighting the possibility, against which we must guard ourselves.

We acknowledge that the free-choice to die has profound impacts, both physical and emotional, on the family, friends and colleagues. We also acknowledge that people (both the one wanting to die and the ones for whom that death is of concern) may have ambivalent feelings, which would need time to be processed. But we also realise that the wish to die, once implemented, is irreversible, and therefore, we do not believe that the process of obtaining euthanasia should be excessively short, and we request that psychological support services be made available to aid decision making. However, in the end, we believe that neither the family nor any other person or institution involved, ought to have the choice of overruling the free choice of the individual. Consequently, the mediatory process would need to be complex and nuanced. A detailed articulation of such a process is beyond our current capacity, and therefore, we will leave that to the relevant professionals to articulate further.

We acknowledge that the delivery of the medical procedure of euthanasia will involve persons other than the one wishing to die. As we have agreed that the matter pertains to the taking of a life, we believe that no medical practitioner or any other person assisting in the process should be compelled to implement the euthanasia. But on balance, we believe that there will be an adequate number of persons willing to implement euthanasia.

In conclusion: We believe that in a secular society such as ours, public policy should not be made on the basis of religion alone, but on the basis of rationality, through publicly accountable processes. Therefore, we are delighted to see this Parliamentary Committee in action. We thank you, Honourable Members of Parliament, for attending to this matter diligently, and we wish you all the best. We are hoping that euthanasia will be legalised in Victoria soon.

Yours faithfully,

The Committee of Management of Progressive Atheists Inc.