30th July 2015

The Secretary,
Legal & Social Issues Committee
Parliament House,
Spring Street,
Melbourne, Victoria 3002

Dear members of the Committee,

Here is our personal submission to the Victorian Parliament Legal & Social Issues Committee regarding the Inquiry into End of Life Choices.

We welcome the Victorian Parliament recognising the need for laws in Victoria to allow citizens to make informed decisions regarding their own end of life choices. This is an opportunity for the state of Victoria to examine how it can best support the work of those who comfort the terminally ill through palliative care and also to encourage the development of individual Advanced Care Plans for those who are facing serious illnesses. Such Advanced Care Plans would take into account the family, emotional and religious issues that the dying person faces.

However it is worrying to us that some members of Parliament and the pro-euthanasia lobby group will see this as an opportunity to push for the legalization of euthanasia via the back door after Euthanasia Bills have been defeated in almost every state of Australia in recent years. The Victorian Parliament has strongly voted against previous moves to introduce euthanasia and there have been no compelling arguments put forward as to why euthanasia should now be legalised.

We are concerned that any moves to introduce euthanasia in Victoria would result in many of the elderly, disabled and people who suffer from chronic illness being pressured by medical staff, relatives and governments into ending their lives prematurely. Such a move would also likely undermine efforts to increase access to and funding for palliative care services for those with a terminal illness.

Each week we visit people in our local community in south east Melbourne who are elderly, seriously ill or disabled to talk, read and pray with them. Over a period of 12 years of doing this voluntary weekend work we have come to know many men and women who have suffered from serious or terminal illness, and most of these have eventually died. It is inspiring for us to see the love that the families have shown to their relatives as they are dying through their words, holding their hands or offering prayers. We have seen first hand how these people’s quality of life is improved when they that they are still loved and valued members of the community, rather than being considered as a burden on society. This included at least one elderly lady where we had been her only regular visitors apart from the staff at the nursing home where she lived.
We have developed a deep respect for those who treat and care for the elderly and terminally ill in nursing homes and in their own homes, and admire their patience and kindness as they help these women and men through this challenging part of their lives. If euthanasia were to be introduced we can foresee that this would alter forever the relationship between patient and doctor / nurse as the seriously ill person will lose trust in someone who is given the power to legally kill them.

Instead we request that the Legal & Social Issues Committee concentrate its efforts in the promotion of palliative care as palliative care as the appropriate treatment for people who are dying. This can be done by advertising the benefits of palliative care such as offering relief from pain, helping people to live as actively as possible until their death, and offering a support system to help families to cope during the dying person's illness and during their bereavement. The Committee could also examine how funding of the palliative care sector can be increased to allow for further research to improve palliative care, and increasing the availability and access to palliative care for all Victorians regardless of what area of the state they live in.

Thank you for your interest in our concerns about this issue. We are available to discuss this issue further if required.

Yours sincerely,

Michael and Maria Palma