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Dear Member of Parliament,

As Parliament prepares to debate proposals to give terminally ill people in England and Wales the right to choose to end their life I am very conscious that you must be wrestling with what that means for us, both as individuals but also as a society. I'm writing to offer you some of my thoughts about the current debate, but also to offer to meet or speak with you to these matters further. As one of the MPs whose constituencies are to be found within the Diocese of Bath and Wells I would be only too glad to support you as you consider this difficult issue.

The question that I have been wrestling with is this: It may be easy to understand why a person would like to have a choice about when they die when they are potentially facing a painful and drawn-out death, but how will that work in practice? Those who are able to articulate their wishes clearly may feel that it sounds a very straightforward process. My concern is for those who don't have a voice or the power to see their wishes respected. What about those individuals who will feel pushed into taking this step, unable to do so free of interference or pressure? What about those who are concerned about being a burden to their family - or even worse, are being coerced by family members - or just worried about their own individual finances as they face a terminal diagnosis. It is immensely striking to me that the principal groups opposing the proposals being made are those who speak for those who live with disabilities and other vulnerabilities. I believe that the voices of the most vulnerable should be amplified in this debate.

Proponents of assisted suicide assure us that safeguarding measures put in place will prevent the vulnerable in our society being pressured to end their lives prematurely. When I look at what has happened in other jurisdictions such as Canada I am far from reassured. Reporting from Canada shows that supposed safeguards designed to protect the vulnerable in the face of assisted suicide legislation there are little more than illusion. I don't know if you've yet had chance to see the excellent BBC documentary 'Better off Dead?' made by *Silent Witness* actress Lizz Carr? If not, please may I heartily recommend this to you? Liz Carr's reporting on what's happening through the provision of medically assisted dying in Canada shows that we are all too potentially at the top of a very slippery slope.

Instead of debating what a law looks like to enable the terminally ill to make the decision to end it at a time of their choosing, I do believe that we should be debating how every member of our society can die well. I hope so much that you will be able to take part in a conversation about what excellent palliative care needs to look like and how we can make it available to everyone. Currently this work is chronically underfunded, largely dependent upon the generous and heroic action of those who run charity shops such as those of the St Margaret's Hospices here in Somerset. This is a truly sorry state of affairs.

We all know that the NHS is under severe financial pressure, and that the funding and resourcing of palliative care is not an easy solution, but I would contend that it is the right solution for everyone in our society – both the powerful and the vulnerable alike.

I am very concerned that assisted suicide will undermine the vulnerable. I know that this is something that you will have been thinking about carefully, doubtless alongside other aspects of the questions that exist within this area. If it were helpful to you, please do call on me. I would be more than happy to discuss the forthcoming Bill and to listen to your views about it.

This comes with every good wish and with huge thanks for all that you do as you serve as one of our Members of Parliament. The questions raised by assisted suicide are immense. Thank you for all you are doing to grapple with these.

+Michael