

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc. (SAVES)

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To all members of the S.A. Parliament

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Dear Member

It will soon be necessary to decide if the Dignity in Dying Bill 2001 is to be debated in the Committee Stage. As there is a conscience vote, what principles should members apply in reaching that decision? Is it enough to have already made up one's mind to support or oppose the Bill, or is there more, much more to it than that?

The issue raised in the above paragraph is not new. The following comments are taken from the Second Reading of the Prostitution Bill on 17 May 2001:

The Hon. K.T. Griffin: “ ... when I came into this place the practice always was, whatever side of politics you were, even if you were going to oppose the third reading of a bill, you had an obligation to endeavour to improve the bill at all stages.”

The Hon. Ian Gilfillan: “It is important that we recognise that we do not have a divine right to arbitrate on what is morally right or wrong ... It is important that we acknowledge that that activity is going on [referring to prostitution, also true of voluntary euthanasia]. We are obliged to acknowledge that and, where we can, put in place legislation to protect and regulate so that it is in its least objectionable form in our community.”

The Hon. M.J. Elliott: “Most Bills that are passed in this place are not as I want them, but we do not oppose every Bill. We try to make the bills as well as we can; ... I would say to all members who are still trying to decide that the ultimate question is not whether or not this bill is as we would have it; the question is whether the bill is making things better.”

Those who recognise that this is one of the most important social issues of our day, having noted developments in Oregon and the Netherlands and impending in Belgium, will be aware that dismissing the Bill lightly, without examining it in detail, will reflect poorly on the capacity of parliament to tackle a thorny issue. If parliament is to override public opinion, it must do so for good demonstrable reasons. Edmund Burke's dictum that the people's representatives should not sacrifice their judgement to public opinion does not excuse them from explaining themselves. Burke also said, “Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*. Men have a right that these wants be provided for by this wisdom.” He might have added that where this will not be done, the people have a right to know why.

Voluntary euthanasia is a matter of deep concern, please do not shrink from the Committee Stage debate.

Yours Sincerely,

Frances Coombe
President