



The Catholic Women's League of Canada

MEMO

DATE: April 11, 2022
FROM: Glenda Carson, national chairperson of legislation
TO: Parish chairpersons of legislation
CC: Parish presidents, diocesan presidents, provincial presidents and life members (upon request)

Following the federal election, the 44th Canadian parliament began on November 22, 2021. While the Liberal Party of Canada maintained its leadership in the House of Commons, it failed to win a majority government. A minority government brings blessings and challenges, depending on the legislation considered. The coalitions formed between the government in power and the opposition parties will affect the ability to pass bills. This may create uncertainty for the outcomes of some of the bills of interest to the League that were lost due to the dissolving of parliament for the election. It remains uncertain of their passing during this parliament or even if they will return for consideration.

Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*, achieved royal assent in March 2021, but it remains a focus of concern for the current parliament. This legislation broadens the eligibility for medical assistance in dying (MAiD) and includes changing the parameters for consent and applying the procedure to new populations, including people suffering with mental illness and those living with disabilities. When the bill achieved royal assent, a “sunset clause” of two years was put in place, preventing the application of Bill C-7 to those suffering with mental illness. This clause allowed an independent panel of experts to provide recommendations for safeguards for persons living with a mental illness. A report was due to the government no later than March 17th. Find more information about the bill at canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/medical-assistance-dying.html.

Concerns specific to the consideration of euthanasia for those living with mental illness are many. While some mental health professionals, including the Canadian Psychiatric Association, supported the expansion of MAiD to include mental illness, many also spoke against including mental illness as a sole criterion. A significant concern is that only one in three Canadians have access to mental health care. This is often due to the lack of services provided, a person not understanding how to access care and/or the lack of support needed to access care.

Members must carefully critique the expert panel's recommended safeguards for mental illness. Please encourage members to be vigilant for opportunities to recommend and support legislation and initiatives that will provide an effective counterbalance for those considering ending their life through MAiD.

The following quote from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is part of the bishops' response to the expansion of Bill C-7. It serves to encourage Catholics to become informed and involved in advocating for those most vulnerable to the effects of the bill.

At this point, it is important to become informed, to renew our involvement wherever we live, and to partner with members of our parish or other faith groups and organizations to continue lobbying our elected officials about these matters. Above all, we need to pray earnestly for a new outpouring of grace, so that the fear and despair experienced by many will give way to courage and hope and that all may welcome the call to support the suffering and dying in ways that reflect the loving and compassionate gaze of Jesus, the risen Lord who lives forever.