



The Salvation Army
Territorial Headquarters
Canada and Bermuda

2 Overlea Blvd.
Toronto ON M4H 1P4

Telephone: 416-422-6192
Fax: 416-422-6201

Office of the Territorial Commander

Giving Hope Today

January 23, 2020

The Honourable David Lametti, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

The Honourable Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ministers Lametti and Hajdu

Re: Public Consultations – MAID

We are writing to thank you for your leadership in consulting Canadians on the very complex and inherently fraught issue of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID).

From our own experience as a national organization that serves vulnerable Canadians in hospital, long-term care, hospice and other settings, we acknowledge and accept that Canadians hold a diversity of views about MAID.

As a faith-based organization whose core values include Hope, Service and Dignity, we strive to support those who come through our doors without discrimination, at the same time believing that every person has inherent value and worth, whatever their circumstances.

Our experience in both care settings and chaplaincy settings tells us that coming to terms with our own mortality and that of our loved ones is difficult at any time. It can be complicated by family dynamics, the challenges of understanding complex medical information, miscommunications and financial stress during emotionally charged times.

While we appreciate that the Quebec Superior Court has declared aspects of the existing law unconstitutional, we are concerned about the implications of medically hastening the death of those who find the prospect of continuing to live unbearable (both physically and psychologically). This vulnerable population may be at risk and therefore we ask for safeguards to be mandated to ensure informed decision making is taking place. Our experience in palliative care settings tells us that effective palliative care can make a significant difference in the lives and decisions of those who are suffering. We hope that, as laws regarding MAID are liberalized, there is an equal commitment to ensure patients have access to quality palliative care (both physical and psychological, genuine options and genuine choice.

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As you consider short-term and longer-term amendments to the *Criminal Code*, we urge you to put in place robust safeguards to ensure that individuals who request MAID have not felt pressured to do so by their loved ones, their health care providers, or by a sense that they are a burden to society or their lives are not worth living.

While we appreciate that any *Charter* analysis must be, inherently, about the individual(s) whose rights or freedoms have been infringed or limited by the state, we also note that, outside of courtrooms, MAID affects not only the person who chooses MAID, but also the health professionals and loved ones surrounding that person. Our staff and clergy are often present when individuals pass away, whether in a residential care setting or in an individual's own home. We see the impact that both end-of-life decisions and the dying process have, not just on the individual who dies, but also on those around them.

We thus urge all policy makers at all levels of government to consider the genuine psychological impact providing MAID or being present during the provision of MAID can have on physicians, nurse practitioners, other support persons, and family members.

Once again, we thank you for your leadership and pray that you and your Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues will have great wisdom as you respond to the Quebec Superior Court decision and plan for a more comprehensive review of the law governing MAID.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide further input as you continue to consider policy options.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Tidd', with a stylized, cursive flourish.

Commissioner Floyd J. Tidd
Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory