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Neil Belanger

Chief Executive Officer

Indigenous Disability Canada (IDC)

British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)

exdir [at] bcands [dot] bc [dot] ca

Thank you, Committee Members. My name is Neil Belanger, and I am a member of the Lax Se el Clan in the House of Nika'teen of the Gitksan Nation, I am also the Chief Executive Officer of Indigenous Disability Canada and the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society, For the past 30 years I have worked within a variety of roles in both the disability and health sectors.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the Esquimalt and Songhees peoples whose territories I am pleased to live and work on, and where I am presenting from today. November 2022 marks the eighth anniversary of Indigenous Disability Awareness Month, an initiative created to celebrate Indigenous peoples with disabilities and the overwhelming contributions that they make to all our communities. It is ironic that today while celebrations of Indigenous people with disabilities are happening across Canada, we meet here to discuss State assisted death for Indigenous children under the MAiD regime.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or UNDRIP received Royal Assent in Canada in 2021. The Declaration provides that member states must consult and cooperate with Indigenous peoples on certain matters, such as “legislative or

administrative measures that may affect them.” This is to obtain their free, prior and informed consent.

Within the reports submitted by the Expert Panels regarding MAID for Mature Minors and MAiD for Mental Illness, it has been verified that no tangible consultation and engagement with Indigenous peoples on MAiD has yet to occur.

Despite this reality, and the overwhelming testimony of representatives from the Indigenous and disability communities against the expansion of MAiD, as heard in previous sessions, to say nothing for the countless news stories, social media posts, nationally and internationally expressing dire concern about the current state of Medical Assistance in Dying, the slippery slope of MAiD remains unfettered.

This begs the question, as to why Canada, this Committee or anyone presume the authority to make recommendations or implement actions for the expansion of State assisted death and suicide for Indigenous children, Indigenous persons with disabilities and Indigenous persons with mental illness as a sole condition, without first engaging those very people whom these proposed changes will target.

This is very difficult to comprehend, particularly considering that Canada has exempted First Nation communities from the Accessible Canada Act until 2026 due to insufficient engagement with Indigenous communities and further, to “better understand the accessibility barriers facing Indigenous people with disabilities.” Canada additionally states that this exemption “reflects the Government of Canada’s commitment to advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.”

The considered expansion of MAiD to include “mature minors,” mental health as a sole condition and other proposed changes to MAiD without comprehensive consultation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada flies in the face of reconciliation and is a further marginalization of Indigenous peoples, and the continuation of the destructive colonial systems and their paternalistic mindset of “trust us, we know what’s best.”

This lack of any tangible consultation with the Indigenous peoples of Canada should compel you as a Committee to advise the Government that in the spirit of true reconciliation, respect for the principles of UNDRIP, and to authentically honor and fulfil the promises made to the Indigenous peoples of Canada, that this Committee’s current work cannot continue, and that recommendations regarding the expansion of MAiD cannot be made or endorsed.

While I am uncertain whether this Committee would take such a step, I am certain that if the eligibility of State assisted death is expanded to include “mature minors” at end of life, rather than providing adequately funded and comprehensive palliative care, this will result in the expansion of MAiD to include “mature minors” not at end of life, who live with disabilities, or have mental illness as a sole condition. This is not a might happen, this is a fact, and this is the slippery slope of MAiD.

We have heard recommendations from pro-MAiD expansion groups and individuals that our children as young as 12 should be eligible for MAiD, that we should be able to euthanize our babies born with disabilities anytime prior to their first birthday, and that persons with disabilities and those with mental illness as a sole condition, not at end of life, whose suffering is only due to lack of supports, supports that we as a country could provide but do not, should be eligible for MAiD.

As a country, Canada can provide adequate supports to ensure a good life for persons with disabilities and those with mental illness, we can provide adequate funding for, and access to, comprehensive palliative care for those at end of life and their families. MAiD should never be seen as the solution to address the absence of those services and resources, but it is fast becoming that, and that is our collective failure as the people of Canada.

Thank you.