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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

Inclusion Canada is a national grassroots organization made up of 13 provincial/territorial organizations and 300 local associations representing over 40,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. For over six decades we’ve advocated for children and adults with intellectual disabilities to be recognized as inherently human; of equal value and worth.

Our federation has been at the forefront of trying to end institutionalization, protect lives, and secure equal access to health care. Canadians with disabilities do not yet enjoy a life of rights and opportunities equivalent to those without disabilities. This is the deeply rooted nature of ableism.

While not a single national organization of persons with disabilities supported the expansion of MAiD and over 200 organizations representing persons with disabilities actively opposed the expansion, one organizational voice appears to have prevailed over all our voices. This one organization is not constituted of or by persons with disabilities, has never been on the frontlines advocating for needed supports, funding or systemic change to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, yet its voice prevails by claiming the dignity of persons with disabilities lies in their death. I can’t think of a more telling example of paternalism and ableism, which together are as insidious and ugly as racism; and now as deadly.

We know a Canada where persons with intellectual disabilities were warehoused by the tens of thousands in institutions. Institutions run by healthcare practitioners who segregated, isolated, maltreated, forcibly sterilized, and anonymously buried persons with intellectual disabilities.

We know a Canada where Canadians with disabilities were denied equal access to life-saving transplants, where infants with treatable conditions went untreated and allowed to die from preventable infections and others who had and have DNR orders imposed without their or their family’s consent. We know a Canada where when a parent murders their child with a disability they are characterized as mercy killers. A Canada where during COVID people with disabilities were threatened by triage policies.

This is the context in which we see MAiD. It is impossible for the lives of persons with disabilities to be safeguarded by a system reliant on the subjective opinion of healthcare practitioners as if they live, work, and think outside of our culture of endemic ableism.

As Canadians we acknowledge the vastly higher rates of suicide among Indigenous youth and adults is a tragic consequence of historical and societal devaluation crying out to be remedied. No one suggests that so many Indigenous people kill or attempt to kill themselves as a function of being Indigenous, but rather of factors outside of themselves that lead to suicide. Instead, we recognize this crisis as a tragedy at the personal, family, community, and national levels to be prevented through action that remedies the sociohistorical and current factors that lead to too many Indigenous people committing or attempting suicide. In this case an individual’s choice to end their life does not outweigh the necessity to maintain this group’s and others’ protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by prohibiting assisted suicide on

the basis of being Indigenous or on ‘race’ or gender for that matter. Only persons with disabilities as an identifiable group are now less protected under our Charter. Imagine a line of people seeking to end their lives and being sorted into two – those whose suicides need to be prevented and those with a disability who are offered death. Let’s be honest that it is not their perceived suffering that separates one from the other but judgement as to the worth of one in contrast to another given their disability.

For persons with disabilities struggling to be perceived as equally valued, to escape poverty, obtain essential supports, find an affordable, and accessible place to live, secure employment, obtain equal medical care, and then when overwhelmed by these challenges – our answer is death.

This is the manifestation of cruelty in law now being considered for extension to those with a mental illness, mature minors and others, all inclusive of children and adults with disabilities.

We do not support the expansion of MAiD and call upon parliament to reinstate the legislation that restricted it to those near the end of life. Legislation that did not discriminate on the basis of disability by only permitting MAiD for those near the end of life. In this context disability is not a prejudicial factor.

It is increasingly urgent that we return Canadians with disabilities to their inherent and full rights by restricting MAiD to Canadians near the end of their life.