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I am Professor Emerita at the University of Ottawa where I taught Criminal Law and Procedure for 34 years. I am also the sister of Matthew, who has developmental and some physical disabilities. I have first-hand experience with the extraordinary wait lists for supportive housing for people like my brother, and with medical professionals who have repeatedly urged us to consider “do not resuscitate” orders when Matthew has required medical treatment.

I add my voice to the clear and unequivocal opposition expressed unanimously by disability rights groups across this country to yet another extension of MAiD. I testified before the Senate Committee that studied Bill C-7 in 2020 to oppose extending MAiD to people with disabilities who are not dying. We lost that fight. And so, the bonfire started: the wood was laid, and a match was lit.

Our worst fears—that people with disabilities would seek MAiD not because their disabling conditions are intolerable but rather because of our abject failure to provide the social and economic supports they need to lead dignified lives—have come true.

When this government then extended MAiD to people suffering mental illness, it added accelerant to the bonfire. I wrote opinion pieces pointing out the discriminatory impacts on women, the fantasy that psychiatrists can distinguish between a mentally ill person who is suicidal and one who is expressing a rational wish to die, and the folly of accepting doctor’s claims that they can determine that a person’s mental suffering cannot be alleviated.

Now here we are, about to toss children into the MAiD bonfire. And this is what they are— they are de facto “children”—unless and until some professional—not even the parent-- decides they can be treated as adults for the purpose of deciding to die. The proposals of some organizations like Dying With Dignity are absolutely chilling. They appear to support a presumption that children of 12 years and older have the capacity to elect MAiD.

This position is impossible to square with how we otherwise treat children. Twelve-year-olds cannot consent to sexual contact. We see the consequences of sexual activity as so life altering, and so full of potential for exploitation, that we brook no exceptions. We also prohibit many other activities to children, like consumption of alcohol or driving vehicles. We do this not only to preserve the lives and well-being of children but also to protect those who love them and other members of the community. How can we even consider allowing children to access government resources to end their own lives?

The MAiD bonfire will now spread to the neighbourhood trees, and no one’s home or loved ones will be safe. What parent has not seen their teenager suffer deeply from anxiety, racism, misogyny, homophobia, depression, social exclusion? I know no one whose child has not struggled with at least one of these conditions. We live in a historical moment where the rates of mental illness experienced by children and youth have never been higher. We know too that intergenerational trauma and sexual abuse play a huge role in generating the mental suffering of young people and that disabled girls are disproportionately at risk.

It is morally wrong to abdicate our responsibility to address these traumas and respond to young people’s distress with every resource we have. It is also wrong to tell our kids that doctors

and the government will help them end their lives if they cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel. Our job is to give them that light, not to help them snuff it out.

My heart breaks for the parents and communities who have lost their teenagers to suicide. They and their families will never, ever be the same. And as we know, suicide among young people can spread like wildfire. We have seen this in Indigenous communities where every young person’s death threatens every other sapling. And we see this phenomenon in other communities as well, where young people already struggling with alienation are devastated and demoralized by the deaths of their friends. The proposal to extend MAiD to teenagers, regardless of their parents’ wishes, is a huge betrayal to those whose kids have taken their own lives and to all communities fighting to keep their teenagers alive.

We must put a firewall around the MAiD bonfire, to at the least keep children and teenagers away. We know that young people’s brains do not fully mature until their twenties, making it impossible for even “mature” youth to imagine either the possibility of a life of purpose or joy when they are stuck in the muck of alienation or adjustment to disability or their sexuality, or to comprehend the finality of death, and the utter devastation their lost lives will wreak upon their families, friends and communities.

Extending MAiD to mature minors is reckless. To trust that doctors can predict which young people cannot be healed or helped, or whether they have the maturity to make such irrevocable decisions, flies in the face of our not-so-distant eugenics past. To pass a law that would require communities and parents do nothing when their young people throw themselves on the bonfire, is to force us watch our futures burn.