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My name is Ahona Mehdi. I'm 19 years old and I'm a member of the Disability Justice Network of Ontario's youth action council. I have multiple disabilities and, with respect to recent amendments to the Criminal Code, some of them would make me eligible for medical assistance in dying.

I'm here today because I'm extremely concerned and distraught, as a disabled youth, about the potential expansion of MAID to mature minors in this country.

Before I begin, I would like each senator and elected official here today to sit with this reality: Had MAID been offered to me just over a year ago when I was accessing treatments as a minor, I would not be here to testify before you today.

Elected officials, you continue to claim that safeguards will be in place for this expansion, that the assessment of MAID applications will be diligent and intentional, but how is this feasible? In Canada, disabled youth pay up to \$200 an hour for therapy, but you are looking to expand access to MAID for these youth and to make it cost-free.

I believe in the right to choose, but making MAID a default option for disabled children who have been failed by your systems equates to coercion, not choice. If this process is truly informed by disability rights and autonomous decision-making, why is it being undertaken during a global pandemic when health care professionals are more overworked than ever?

A recent survey by the Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program shows us that Canadian health care professionals are steadily and increasingly being approached by parents of

children, including infants too young to make an informed decision, regarding access to MAID. This is scary and it proves that these discussions are only amplifying suicide messaging. How has knowledge around access to MAID for mature minors been made so widely accessible when the government consistently and intentionally refuses to make home care, palliative care, assistive devices, gender affirming and culturally competent care, counselling and other resources accessible to disabled youth?

The potential of expanding track two of MAID to mature minors scares me as I think about my past experiences within the health care system. When I was 17, my loved ones admitted me to a hospital with hopes that I would receive support and care, but I was met with the opposite. My assigned psychiatrist told me that I needed to get over my anxiety if I wanted to be successful. He told me that if I ever had a suicidal thought, I should just shove it in a drawer and lock it away. As a teenager, I was placed in spaces where I was consistently harassed by other patients—adult male patients. Rather than having the issues I was experiencing in the hospital addressed and having a safer space created, I was consistently met with medication. This was done without taking the time to understand my situation, and I was often provided with treatments that worsened my conditions.

I fear for disabled youth like me and those who have it worse than I do, who could be offered MAID in place of treatment or care. In the same way institutions continue to use prescription drugs as band-aid solutions for complex concerns, expanding MAID would be truly reckless. Placing the onus to choose between life and death on individual disabled children while neglecting the realities of systemic ableism in this country is truly egregious.

You continue to claim you are centering the right for disabled people to die with dignity, but death cannot be the default option for disabled youth who are struggling. I am asking you to oppose this expansion and to fight for an alternative in which disabled youth are met with a government that wants us to live with dignity. I am here asking you to pause, to slow down and to fight this expansion. I am here because I refuse to let you discuss and question my right to live without me. I refuse to let you question the right for Black, Indigenous, racialized disabled youth to live and be cared for, especially without making an intentional effort to create space for them.

You claim you want to end our suffering, but you are only inflicting pain when you allow your fear of disability to inform your decision that those of us currently living with disabilities are disposable and unworthy of living.

Thank you.