**John Kelly letter to the Boston globe, September 7th, 2021**

**https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/09/07/opinion/push-assisted-suicide-raises-questions-over-disability-rights/**

**LETTERS**

**Push for assisted suicide raises questions over disability rights**

September 7, 2021

In response to an essay on the Victorian fantasy of a peaceful death, two letter writers ([“Beyond the fantasy of a gentle death,”](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/08/29/opinion/beyond-fantasy-gentle-death/?p1=Article_Inline_Text_Link) Aug. 29) called on the state Legislature to pass the proposed assisted suicide bill.

Paula Bacon and Molly DeHaas Walsh describe the circumstances of difficult deaths and believe that assisted suicide would bring them control, choice, and dignity when their pain and suffering become unbearable.

But when doctors misdiagnose people as terminal, the possibility of real choice disappears. [Studies](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4118712/) show that 12 percent to 15 percent of people outlive hospice, but in [Oregon](https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PROVIDERPARTNERRESOURCES/EVALUATIONRESEARCH/DEATHWITHDIGNITYACT/Documents/year23.pdf), with its Death With Dignity Act, only about 4 percent of people have lived past six months. This suggests that as many as 1 in 10 people ended their life prematurely. No one would tolerate any other elective treatment this deadly.

The Oregon reports show that the main “end-of-life concerns” stem not from physical pain but from [“existential distress](http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMms1700606)” over the disabling aspects of serious illness, such as dependence, status loss (“dignity”), incontinence, and feeling like a burden on others.

As someone paralyzed below the shoulders, I am terrified of the prospect of a state law sponsoring people’s suicides as rational responses to disability. Massachusetts should instead fully fund home care and provide world-class palliative care. Equality under the law depends on it.

John B. Kelly

Boston

The writer is director of the disability rights group Second Thoughts MA, which opposes the legalization of assisted suicide.