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Department of Health Certificate of Need hearing

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments today. I am a client support volunteer with Compassion & Choices of Washington. I visit with clients and their families to discuss their end of life options, including the option of aid in dying. I don't push people in any direction—their choices are their own. But if they decide they want to use Washington's Death with Dignity law, I help them find cooperating physicians and pharmacists. And regardless of how they choose to go through their dying process, I provide support to the client and family through the time of death.

I have volunteered in Vancouver, Washington over the past many years. We used to have a good handful of doctors in town who were willing to help patients with the Death with Dignity Act. But after the merger between Southwest Washington Medical Center and PeaceHealth, I'm down to one cooperating physician in town. My clients at Peacehealth tell me their doctors won't help them. The doctors tell them "I'm so sorry, but I'm not allowed to talk about that."

It is really hard for my clients in Vancouver to use the law. They are usually very sick, within weeks or a month of dying. Travel is tough for them. But with only one cooperating physician in town, I have been driving clients to other doctors in Tacoma or further to meet the two doctor requirement in the law. Some patients are too sick to make the trip. If the Catholic hospitals take over medicine in Olympia and Tacoma, my clients may lose access completely.

I had one client who lived in a rural community, and he was too sick to travel. His cancer was in its end stages—he was swollen up like a beach ball so I could see his veins through his skin. He was in incredible pain. He had wanted to get a prescription to hasten his death, and I tried to find help for him. But there were no doctors available in his community, and he was too sick to drive. He hadn't had a bowel movement in six days and he was at his wits' end. He shot himself in the head and died.

I feel outraged about how patients suffer when they can't get access to honest information and the services they need. We have a responsibility as a community to take care of our own as they are dying. The merger in Vancouver has really cut people off from information and services, and that's not right. Please do everything you can to make sure patients can still get what they need, regardless of who owns the hospital. Thank you.

Edward James Moody