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April 13, 2015

Dear Senators Wolk and Monning,

The National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) respectfully opposes your bill, Senate Bill 128, which enacts the End of Life Option Act. NCIL is the longest-running national cross-disability, grassroots organization run by and for people with disabilities. Founded in 1982, NCIL represents thousands of organizations and individuals including: individuals with disabilities, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs), and other organizations that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities throughout the United States.

It is important to note that disability is a large component of many end-of-life decisions. Whether individuals are making end-of-life decisions due to aging, chronic conditions, or terminal illness, disability often accompanies these processes, resulting in functional losses that become pivotal in the decision-making process.

NCIL opposes SB 128 because we believe that physician-assisted suicide legislation discriminates against people who are aging, ill, or disabled. This legislation reinforces the belief that individuals with disabilities are 'burdensome' and that our lives are not worth living. It reinforces stereotypes that depending on others for assistance with activities of daily living is not dignified, which the disability community strongly opposes.

People facing terminal diagnoses are a vulnerable population. Individuals with disabilities and increased health needs are at a much higher risk for abuse, coercion, and exploitation. Legislation such as SB 128 increases these risks. Instead of legislation that makes it easier for people with disabilities to end their lives, efforts should be taken to provide equal suicide prevention and access to support. People with significant disabilities and terminal illnesses should not have to die to have dignity.

Please do not hesitate to call (202) 207-0334 ext. 1104, if you would like to discuss our position further.

Sincerely,

Kelly Buckland  
Executive Director