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March 20, 2015

The Hon. Peter MacKay
Minster of Justice and Attorney General of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Minister,

On behalf of the national executive of The Catholic Women's League of Canada, representing more than 85,000 members and citizens, I write to applaud you for continuing to uphold the value and respect for human life throughout the Carter v Canada (Attorney General) case and to appeal to you to continue to do so despite the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada to strike down the *Criminal Code* provisions against physician assisted suicide. I write most importantly to ask that more time be given to the citizens of Canada to consider this life and death issue.

To help someone commit suicide is neither an act of justice nor mercy and it does not witness to a culture of life or demonstrate care for our neighbour. Compelled by faith and our collective conscience, we understand and accept our obligation and duty to act for the good of our fellow citizens, especially for those who, because of disability, suffering or weakness, now find themselves becoming more vulnerable in the reality of state-sanctioned death.

The decision of the Court threatens to have harmful and far-reaching effects on individual Canadians, institutions of healthcare, associations of medical professionals, and more importantly on future generations. The rights of those who are vulnerable, particularly the poor, the suffering and those who are dying must be protected and promoted. Consideration is needed for those individuals who will not and cannot accept suicide as a medical solution to alleviate pain and suffering of those who are vulnerable, allowing them to maintain their sacred trust to respect life and the process of natural death in those that they care for.

The Court has offered limited guidance to interpret the judgement. Therefore the League implores the federal government to proceed by seeking qualified medical, legal and moral submissions, and to resist the temptation for the legalization of mercy killing. The timeline imposed by the Court seems unrealistic in promoting informed discussion on such a foundational value, unnecessarily introducing duress into a process that should involve consultation, debate and the formulation of legislation.

The League supports the federal government requesting an extension to the deadline imposed by the Court to allow for a full enquiry into the issue. Consultation, discussion and dialogue will only serve to support the federal government when crafting a new law, and would mitigate the harm done by the Court decision. Medical professionals must also be allowed an opportunity for input to ensure their right to freedom of conscience and to protect their responsibility to be agents of healing rather than death, all of which requires time and transparency.

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For its part, The Catholic Women's League of Canada will continue to advocate for a national palliative care strategy, and to provide care for the elderly, disabled, sick and those who are isolated or marginalized. League members will continue to daily bear witness to the dignity of each human life at every stage of existence from beginning to natural end, and to desire a compassionate country that values each citizen, especially those who feel they have no choice but to commit suicide because of loneliness, loss of autonomy, a sense of burden to the family, or the fear of pain and suffering without friends or family. As Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, stated in response to the Supreme Court ruling, "any society that authorizes killing people through assisted suicide has lost its moral compass." We do not wish to see this happen in Canada.

I look forward to hearing from you how the federal government will advocate for a process that will allow all aspects of this issue to be studied.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Dowding". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Dowding
National President

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Cc: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops