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**DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATES SEE “DOUBLE STANDARD” IN PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY PAPER**

“Our society supports suicide prevention programs for non-disabled teens. Why should ill and disabled youth be enabled to kill themselves via assisted suicide? This double standard shows a clear bias against life with a disability,” said Taylor Hyatt, policy analyst and outreach coordinator for Toujours Vivant-Not Dead Yet. TVNDY is a nonreligious and nonpartisan organization of Canadians with disabilities who oppose assisted suicide.

“We already have laws that restrict teens’ freedom in order to prevent self-harm,” added Hyatt. “For example, we enforce minimum ages for the purchase of tobacco or alcohol. Why shouldn't an equally serious matter – assisted suicide – be treated the same way?” Hyatt was responding to the publication last week of a position paper by the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) showing a high demand among parents for euthanasia of ill and disabled children.

Hyatt noted that the CPS’ proposal goes beyond the study of extending euthanasia to “mature minors” mandated by Canada’s assisted suicide legislation. Newborns and children too young to consent to medical treatment would also be eligible. “The demand for assisted suicide from parents is troubling. Non-disabled parents of disabled children may view the child’s life as a burden, a tragedy, or ‘not worth living.’” Hyatt stated.

“A child exposed to these beliefs will often develop low self-esteem, which can lead to suicidal feelings. The real issue is societal discrimination – not the disability,” said Hyatt. In addition, negative messages are re-enforced by isolation and a lack of role models for ill and disabled young people.

Parents’ biases also manifest in more extreme ways. Some demand major surgeries to simplify their child’s care, such as sterilization. “Especially in the case of very young children, we must ask whose ‘suffering’ assisted suicide is designed to prevent.” Hyatt concluded.

Toujours Vivant-Not Dead Yet (TVNDY) is an organization by and for people with disabilities and our allies. Its goal is to inform, unify and give a voice to disabled people who oppose assisted suicide, euthanasia and other discriminatory end-of-life practices.

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