

Liberals press ahead with changes to assisted-suicide law

The federal Liberals are vowing to pass changes to Canada's assisted suicide law before a court-imposed deadline even though if they will be in the position to make changes remains to be seen.

By proroguing Parliament until Sept. 23, the government has effectively suspended much of the business of Parliament and government bills still on the table will have to be reset as well, among these Bill C-7 to make it easier for Canadians to access an assisted death.

The Liberals are promising to relaunch the government's agenda with a throne speech, but that exposes the government to a confidence vote in the House of Commons.

Bill C-7 proposes a two-tier system for those whose death is reasonably foreseeable and those whose death is not. It would also allow a waiver of final consent for those whose death is reasonably foreseeable but "who may lose capacity to consent before MAiD (medical assistance in dying) can be provided."

It also eliminates a previous regulation that required those who seek an assisted death and whose death was reasonably foreseeable to wait for at least 10 days before the procedure can be provided, which in theory allowed Canadians seeking MAiD to change their mind.

A justice ministry spokesperson says that despite only having until Dec. 18 to change the national system, which itself is an extension of a previous deadline to bring the law in line with a Quebec Superior Court ruling that said restrictions are too restrictive, the Liberals intend to pass changes by the court's deadline.

"Medical assistance in dying is a difficult, complex and deeply personal issue. We were proud to bring forward a bill in February that proposed changes to the current law, informed by consultations with Canadians, experts and the broader legal and health community," said Rachel Rappaport, spokesperson for federal Justice Minister David Lametti.

"Our government has every intention of meeting the court's deadline."

But that is based on the Liberal government surviving a confidence vote, a vote it needs to continue its COVID-19 pandemic response agenda. How such a vote will play out is unknown at this time as the Conservatives under new leader Erin O'Toole have indicated he would try to take the minority Liberal government down as soon as possible. The Bloc Quebecois has also recently

raised the possibility of voting down the government in the wake of the WE scandal.

Euthanasia Prevention Coalition president Alex Schadenberg continues to call on the federal government to stop moving forward with its proposed changes to assisted dying, which he argues go far beyond what the Quebec court decision actually requires, and instead undertake a five-year review of the system in Canada as was promised when assisted dying was legalized in 2016 in response to a Supreme Court ruling.

“Canada needs to do a proper review of the law before even considering expanding it,” Schadenberg said, adding proroguing Parliament appears to be to “protect the government from recent scandals and to prepare for a possible fall election.”

The fate of other bills that are of particular concern to many religious Canadians such as a proposed ban on conversion therapy, a controversial practice of trying to convert people from a homosexual to a heterosexual lifestyle, may take longer than the government had hoped.