

New attorney general has no plans to expand euthanasia

Euthanasia opponents welcomed news Canada's new Attorney General David Lametti says the Liberal government has no plans to expand access to assisted suicide in the near future.

"In some senses I'm relieved," said Alex Schadenberg, who had expressed concern when Lametti was tapped to replace Jody Wilson-Raybould as Justice Minister and Attorney General.

Lametti, a former law professor, was one of four Liberal MPs who voted against the so-called Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) law in 2016. He did so because he said it was too restrictive and unconstitutional.



David Lametti

"I had a strong feeling Lametti would give the Liberals some wind in their sails for expansion of the law because of his previous positioning in saying the law did not go far enough," Schadenberg said.

"At first all the media were glad to see he was named, knowing his position," said Aubert Martin, director of the Quebec grassroots anti-euthanasia organization Living with Dignity. "They all thought it would be an open door to amend the law."

But Martin said it did not surprise him that Lametti told the *Toronto Star* Feb. 13 the government will not be re-opening the law until its five-year review period is up in 2021.

"It is quite impossible for him to do so now," Martin said. "It would not be aligned with the federal government position" in the Truchon/Gladu challenge of the Quebec euthanasia law that restricts access to those at end of life.

Jean Truchon, 51, and Nicole Gladu, 73 both have chronic illness but are ineligible for euthanasia because they are not at end of life. Hearings began in this case at the beginning of January and are expected to wrap up by the end of this month.

Martin pointed out the federal government has argued removing the restriction to end of life would endanger those with disabilities and chronic illness and “feed the negative perceptions of them already rampant in society.”

“It could open the door to legitimating suicide as a viable option,” said Marin, noting the federal government has been defending “the inherent value of every person.”

“Too bad they didn’t understand they would be opening the door, even if restricting it to end of life,” he said, noting those at end of life also have inherent human dignity.

Martin noted a similar court case is coming up in British Columbia challenging a similar provision in the federal euthanasia law that a person’s death must be reasonably foreseeable.

Lametti told the *Star* he had “had his say” on the law, and remains sympathetic to those who could not access MAID, but stressed the “important balance” the law achieved as “an important first step in a moral and ethical debate.”



Alex Schadenberg

Schadenberg thinks the government has done some polling to show “there isn’t overwhelming support for the expansion of the law.”

In advance of the 2019 election, “if they can’t create a wedge issue that works for them, they are going to leave it alone,” he said.

“Previous to the Bill C-14 euthanasia bill, they did polling, and found people wanted a waiting period; they did not want it for children, or for those with mental illness alone,” he said. “They saw that polling, clearly showing Canadians are not in favor of these things.”

Schadenberg acknowledged Canadian public opinion may have moved a bit, but “why

go into an election saying 'I'm going to change the law'?"

With the unfolding controversy over the engineering giant SNC-Lavalin, "you don't want to create too many difficult issues for yourself at the same time," he said.

Though the review of the euthanasia law won't take place until after the election, Schadenberg pointed out Dying with Dignity and similar lobby groups want to see the law expanded "so you don't have to be competent at the time of your death, only when you make the request," or so-called advance requests for euthanasia; for the euthanasia of "mature minors," or children under 18; and for those with mental illness but no other illness making death foreseeable.