

Euthanasia opponents concerned about Quebec consultations

OTTAWA – The Quebec government may be trying to usurp federal jurisdiction in launching consultations on assisted suicide, said Canadian euthanasia opponents.

Alex Schadenberg, director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, said that while health care is a provincial matter, he is concerned that the province might use the health care framework to allow acts that are illegal under the Criminal Code of Canada. Aiding and abetting suicide is a crime in Canada.

“Basically, it is within provincial jurisdiction to look at how we provide care for people, not how we can kill them,” he said.

“This is not a health matter; it is a matter of public safety,” said Michele Boulva, Catholic Organization for Life and Family director. “Taking someone else’s life is murder, no matter how you try to disguise it, and it is definitely an area of federal jurisdiction.”

On Dec. 3, the Quebec government announced it would open a debate on assisted suicide by launching a traveling consultation. First, the province will seek the advice of about 20 experts to create a discussion paper to guide the conversation.

“I don’t think there’s any risk in launching a reflection,” Quebec Health Minister Yves Bolduc said Dec. 3, the Canadian Press reported.

“It’s a complex question and opinions are divided, but I think there’s a consensus that everyone would want to die with dignity and want their loved ones to die with dignity,” Bolduc said.

Boulva said the Quebec government announcement should be a call to action.

“Let’s hope that associations representing Canadians with disabilities and so many other Canadians living with life-threatening conditions will stand up and clearly indicate to the government that their members want to live,” she said.

Earlier this fall, the Quebec College of Physicians issued a report favoring euthanasia under limited circumstances. Its president told journalists that death can be a treatment in some cases. Polls show support for euthanasia and assisted suicide is higher in Quebec than in any other province.

This is not the first time the province of Quebec has challenged federal jurisdiction in legal matters. The Supreme Court of Canada is considering a Quebec challenge of the Assisted Human Reproduction Act.

The province has argued that human fertility matters are health matters and thus under provincial jurisdiction. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have intervened in the case, arguing that the federal government needs to have jurisdiction in moral and ethical areas of national concern.