

TBR STATEMENT ON PHYSICIAN ASSISTED DYING

The recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada has significantly shifted the discussion about appropriate end-of-life treatment for individuals facing painful terminal illnesses. As rabbis, we represent a tradition that places great stress on human dignity and the sanctity of life. We recognize that individuals and their families face challenging personal situations when dealing with extremely debilitating illnesses with little or no possibility of cure or comfort. Many of us have been with families at these trying times. We remain committed to the provision of Hesed, acts of lovingkindness, to support and sustain individuals and families facing these real situations.

We are concerned that the Supreme Court decision, while responding to the pain of individuals, may blur the distinctive protection that we give to human life and perhaps influence persons who are vulnerable as a result of progressive and terminal illness. We call upon Jews and all people to provide active support and comfort to those who are dying, so that no one, because of loneliness, vulnerability, loss of decision-making ability, or fear of pain and suffering, will feel a desperate need to actively end life.

We call upon the various legislative bodies that will be developing laws, policies and procedures in response to the ruling of the Supreme Court to first act to provide adequate funding for high quality palliative and hospice care and excellent social support for the weak, the ill, the elderly, the disabled and those who are socially isolated. We further ask that these various governmental bodies interpret the recent judgment in narrow terms providing safeguards to deter abuse and allowing for freedom of conscience for health-care workers who do not accept assisted dying as a medical response to pain and suffering.