

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 28th April 2015

Judicial review of CPS assisted suicide prosecution guidelines highlights an important issue

The national pro-life charity LIFE has expressed support for Nikki Kenward, the anti-euthanasia campaigner, who has been granted permission at the High Court today to take forward a judicial review of Crown Prosecution Service assisted suicide guidelines. Ms Kenward argued successfully that the new guidelines potentially weaken protection for vulnerable people, as they arguably make it easier for healthcare workers to escape prosecution for assisting a suicide.

LIFE spokesman, Niall Gooch, said: "The original guidelines, issued in February 2010, stated that if someone accused of assisting a suicide were a medical professional, this would count as a point in favour of prosecuting them, regardless of whether or not they were involved in the care of the victim. The new guidelines say that the accused person's status as a medical professional will only count as a point in favour of prosecution if that person has a duty of care to the victim . i.e. has a prior existing relationship with them. It's hard to see how this helps protect the sick, elderly, disabled and dying. More generally, it is inappropriate for the Director of Public Prosecutions to make sweeping revisions to the application of the law. The CPS's actions look particularly unwise in light of the fact that an assisted suicide Bill was actually being debated in Parliament at the time the revised guidelines were published."

"Worryingly, the October 2014 revision was welcomed by well-known pro-euthanasia campaigners like Dr Michael Irwin, who saw correctly that it was another foot in the door for their movement. Dr Irwin called it a "wonderful softening" that would "make life easier" for people like him."

"The High Court's decision to allow the judicial review to go forward is very welcome. We cannot afford to have ambiguity around the role of health professionals, and uncertainty about the absolute prohibition against intentionally ending patients' lives. We are not vitalists: we do not think that everyone should always be kept alive by any means possible, but the bright line represented by the law against intentional killing must be maintained. We must send the clear message that killing is illegal, and we must not hesitate to prosecute people against whom there is a strong case."

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For further media comment please call the LIFE Media Hotline on 07867 744502

LIFE is a pro-life charity that supports anyone facing a crisis pregnancy, pregnancy loss or after an abortion, and strives to engage, inspire and inform the next generation.