

# ASSISTED SUICIDE LAWS

## PATIENTS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES AT GREAT RISK

"I am Ruthie Poole, president of M-POWER, a statewide group made up of people with lived experience of mental health diagnosis, trauma, and addiction.

As people with psychiatric disabilities, M-POWER members feel passionate about the right to self-determination. However, that is not what assisted suicide gives us.

It is not uncommon for people with disabilities and elders who may not be physically well to feel like they're a burden on their families. Prescribing doctors in Oregon last year reported that more than half of program suicides felt like a burden on family, friends, or caregivers. Sadly, if physician-assisted suicide were to become law in Massachusetts, some people may be coerced, either subtly or more obviously, by their families to agree to this.

*"Depression is treatable and reversible. Suicide is not."*

Historically, people with psychiatric diagnoses have been subjected to all forms of legal and extra-legal coercion, often abetted by these same professionals. Gatekeeping professionals continue to underestimate our capabilities and block us from living our own lives. Based on these experiences, we cannot trust that counselors will have our best interests in mind when evaluating our motives for requesting assisted suicide.

At the same time, people in the midst of a severe depression can usually present as 'unimpaired,' especially in a single meeting with an unknown counselor.

Those of us in M-POWER know that depression is insidious. We know that depression does impair judgment. As a therapist once told me, depression does not cause black and white thinking; it causes black and blacker thinking. Absolute hopelessness and seeing no way out are common feelings for those of us who have experienced severe depression. Personally, as someone who has been suicidal in the past, I can relate to the desire for 'a painless and easy way out.' However, depression is treatable and reversible. Suicide is not."



**RUTHIE POOLE**