

# Assisted suicide Bill is not safe, say top peers

BY MADELEINE TEAHAN

PROMINENT Catholic peers are among the co-authors of a report raising serious concerns about a new assisted-suicide Bill that is due to be debated in Parliament this year.

Baroness Hollins of Wimbledon and Baroness Cumberlege of Newick are among 11 peers who have expressed strong opposition to Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill on the grounds that it "does not pass the public safety test".

In their analysis of the latest piece of legislation, the peers said: "The law that we have already has the discretion to deal with exceptional cases in an exceptional way. What is being proposed in Lord Falconer's bill – the creation of a licensing system for such acts – is something completely different.

"To create such a system would be to cross an important Rubicon. Parliament would not seriously consider enacting a law to license other criminal offences in certain prescribed circumstances, and it is difficult to see why it should be asked to do so in this case."

The peers' report listed a number of concerns about the Bill's lack of safeguards including safeguarding applicants who are prone to depression.

The peers noted that Lord Falconer's Bill does not stipulate that psychiatric assessment must be mandatory for



Baroness Hollins

applicants who might be prone to depression.

The report said: "It is surprising, in view of the evidence that clinical depression is sometimes overlooked by doctors assessing assisted suicide requests in Oregon, that Lord Falconer's Bill does not require referral for specialist psychiatric assessment either in all cases where a request for assisted suicide is made or at least in cases where the assessing doctor has doubts about the mental capacity of an applicant or suspects that judgment-impairing depression might be present."

Lord Falconer's Bill has received its first reading in the House of Lords and its second reading is expected in the Lords in the autumn.

The Bill is drafted on the basis of Lord Falconer's Commission on Assisted Dying which released a report in January 2012 calling for assisted suicide to be legalised for the terminally ill.

Catholic Herald 28.6.13