

# Disabled woman fights easing of right-to-die rules

**Nicholas Hellen**

SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

A WOMAN who was once so paralysed she could only wink her right eye will this week launch a High Court challenge against "liberal" guidelines on assisted suicide brought in by Alison Saunders, the embattled director of public prosecutions (DPP).

Nikki Kenward, 62, will on Tuesday seek a judicial review after doctors and nurses who help severely disabled or terminally ill people to take their own lives were told that they are now less likely to face criminal charges.

Kenward, of Aston on Clun, Shropshire, said: "The message from these new guidelines is that society thinks you are in the way. The best thing you can do is to agree to die."

Lawyers for Kenward will argue that Saunders exceeded her powers with the guidelines issued last October, and has entered a policy realm that should be a matter for parliament. They will also say that the attorney-general has failed in his duty to "superintend" the DPP.

They are expected to argue Saunders's guidance will "enable healthcare professionals operating on an ideological or other premise to offer their services to a person wishing to commit suicide ... this is crossing the Rubicon". They will add: it will "make

any prohibition on a Dignitas-style of assisted suicide difficult to resist".

"[It] weakens the protection given by parliament to people ... coming under pressure to commit assisted suicide."

Kenward, a former theatre manager, was struck down by Guillian-Barre syndrome in 1990, aged 37. Her son, Alfie, was then just one.

She was initially fully paralysed for more than five months, and has been in a wheelchair since. She cannot tie her laces or hold a needle, but had a play staged last year and campaigns against euthanasia and assisted suicide through the Distant Voices pressure group.

Kenward said she and her husband, Merv, 50, do not receive support from their families and that she had heard people dismiss her as a "scrounger".

"I've heard people say, 'You're all right. You've got a car,' but for me, I would say, 'Just give me my legs back.'"

She described her illness: "It's like waking up as a cockroach in Kafka's novel, *The Metamorphosis*. Your life becomes smaller and full of fear. If you knew that nobody values you, how would that feel?"

She said she was worried about her future if her husband were no longer able to look after her.

Lord Falconer of Thoroton, a former lord chancellor, has said he will try to revive an assisted dying bill after the general election that would be designed to provide "competent" adults who have less than six months to live with assistance to end their own life if they requested it.

Andrea Williams, the chief executive of the Christian Legal Centre, which is backing Kenward's legal challenge, said: "Alison Saunders is supposed to uphold the law, not to make the law."

A spokesman for the DPP declined to comment.



Kenward: 'life full of fear'

Sunday Times April 26 2015