

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF MARYLAND SENATE BILL #701 -- End of Life Option Act

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By Linda M Lampkin

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I am writing in support of Senate Bill #701, the End-of-Life Option Act.

I could talk about my mother's death at the age of 103, after two years of round-the-clock care in and out of hospice, or my mother-in-law who refused radiation and chemotherapy treatment for cancer and died at home after 9 months of suffering, or my friend with metastasized cancer who wanted to die at home in hospice but was taken to a hospital where he suffered through many unnecessary and painful procedures in his last days, but I won't. I am sure that everyone here (including you as our elected representatives) has similar stories and you will hear many of them today.

But I am speaking here now because I feel so strongly about the need for this option in Maryland, including, of course, myself and my loved ones. Perhaps this is a strange way to phrase this since we are dealing with death – the issue on which we really don't have options. But is that really true?

As a Maryland resident since the 1980s, first in Accokeek and now in Baltimore, for me, the issue is all about choice. End-of-life choices should be left to the individual, his/her family and doctor. Right now, our laws are out of date, and unwanted medical care is being literally forced on helpless patients who are terminally ill. Not everyone will take this option, but death with dignity should be available as a choice.

Recent polls in Maryland show that this issue has broad support across the state. The legislation you are considering was carefully drafted by Compassion & Choices. Its provisions are the same ones that have ensured safety and prevented any abuses in Oregon for almost two decades and are also in effect in 8 other states plus DC. And always remember, this is an option with many safeguards against possible abuse – no one needs to exercise it if they don't want to.

As an elected official in Maryland, you now have the opportunity to provide this needed option for those who are dying. There are obviously many strongly held opinions and beliefs on this subject. But I will conclude with a statement by California Governor Jerry Brown when he signed that state's End of Life Option legislation on October 15, 2015:

"I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others."

Please support SB701 and allow Maryland residents this choice to ease pain and suffering and allows death with dignity, if they choose to do so.