

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Hearing, February 28, 2020

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB701

Good afternoon Senators:

My name is Dr. Cathy Larner-Beckett and I live in Heritage Harbour in Annapolis.

I am a retired special education teacher and principal, a volunteer with people with disabilities, a cancer survivor, a person with a disability, and a Catholic. This bill is very personal for me.

I am here to ask you to support the End of Life Options Bill (SB701) because it is the compassionate, right thing to do – to allow people with a terminal diagnosis to have some control and dignity, and the **option** for a peaceful death, at the end of their life.

As most people my age, I've survived both of my parents, both lifelong Catholics, and I watched them die in very different ways more than 20 years apart. My father was in hospice, but at the end, he was in intolerable pain despite the administration of morphine.

I watched as this strong man, a combat veteran, a teacher, a member of the DC Boxing Hall of Fame, and a Superman in my eyes, screaming in severe pain. His family, who loved him dearly, stood by horrified, helpless to stop it, waiting, and praying, for it to end. It was intolerable for my dad and for his family. It was a scene I will never forget and hope to never see again.

My mother died 3 years ago. Despite being a Catholic who attended Mass at least once a week, she supported my advocacy for this end of life option prior to her death. She was in hospice for a year – twice the 6 months prognosis given her. She did not die in the 6-month window her doctors predicted, but there was **no quality of life** in those extra 6 months. They were miserable for her and for her family who watched her waste away, literally. This 5 foot 7 woman who normally weighed 145 pounds weighed **a mere 76 pounds** at her death. **Her living was not extended but her suffering, and her death, were.**

Those who do not support this bill use irrelevant predictions of people with disabilities being coerced to use this option. These fears are proven to be unfounded.

A combined total of over 40 years of data from DC and the 9 states who now have this option have shown **not a single case of abuse and no slippery slope.** **Individuals with a cognitive disability, persons with dementia or mental illness, and people who are physically unable to self-administer are not eligible to use this option. To attempt to persuade or coerce someone to use this option is a felony.**

As a lifelong advocate for people with disabilities, and a person with a disability, I support this bill which has more than adequate protections for people with disabilities.

As a Catholic, I support this bill because I believe that God has already decided your fate and I know that a merciful God would not want us to suffer needlessly when there are compassionate options. When we choose to treat cancer are we ignoring God's will for us to die? God has given us the ability to make our own choices and this option at the end of life is one more choice.

Lastly, I leave you with the words of California Gov. Jerry Brown, a former Jesuit Seminary student who studied for the priesthood, and who faced a gut-wrenching moral conflict over the decision to sign the bill. In the end, he reflected on what he would want at the end of life.

His words when he signed this option into law were, and I quote from his letter:

"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."

I ask that you vote **FOR** the End of Life Option Act so that all terminal Marylanders have the right to a peaceful, dignified death.

Thank you!

Dr. Cathy Lerner-Beckett

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