



# AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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February 28, 2020

The Honorable Sen. William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairperson, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing  
11 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: SUPPORT for SB 701, Testimony from American Atheists in support of a bill providing end of life options and care**

Dear Chairperson Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

As a Maryland resident and National Field Director for American Atheists, which has nearly 1,100 constituents in Maryland, I thank you for considering SB 701, a vital measure that will ensure that terminally ill adults have access to compassionate end-of-life care options and medical aid-in-dying. This legislation will reduce government interference in the personal lives of citizens by allowing people who are terminally ill to make fundamentally personal decisions about their health care and lives. We urge you to swiftly pass this important bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation" between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. As advocates for the health, safety, and well-being of all Americans, American Atheists objects to efforts to subordinate medical care to the religious beliefs of providers and institutions.

SB 701 would establish a path for terminally ill patients in Maryland to receive medical aid-in-dying, creating a process that includes partnership between the individual and their health care provider. States that have chosen to enact medical aid in dying legislation have been successful in providing comfortable and dignified end-of-life care for terminally ill individuals.

For example, the state of Oregon passed a medical aid-in-dying law in 1997, and since that time, the process established by law has functioned as intended. There has been no evidence of abuse by

providers, nor of loss of control by terminally ill patients.<sup>1</sup> Studies of the Oregon Death with Dignity Act found that, "persons dying in Oregon are less likely to be hospitalized and more likely to use hospice services at home." Furthermore, in 2013 nearly two-thirds of Oregonians died in their own home, including 97% of individuals that used medical aid-in-dying processes established by the Death with Dignity Act. Nationally, however, although approximately 80% of Americans desire to pass in the comfort of their own home, less than 20% actually do so.<sup>2</sup> Instead, 60% of Americans die in acute care hospitals, often after receiving unwanted medical care.

Research shows that 73% of Americans support medical aid-in-dying for terminally ill patients, and yet only 8 states have passed laws establishing medical aid-in-dying processes.<sup>3</sup> Maryland should join them by passing this legislation to allow for better end-of-life options for its residents.

This legislation would create a patient-driven system that honors an individual's values and beliefs. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation to allow terminally ill people in Maryland to choose to die with peace and dignity. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of this important bill. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support for SB 701, please contact Alison Gill, American Atheists Vice President for Legal & Policy, at 908.276.7300 x309 or by email at [agill@atheists.org](mailto:agill@atheists.org).

Sincerely,



Samantha McGuire  
National Field Director  
American Atheists

cc: All Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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<sup>1</sup> Tolle SW & Teno JM. (2017). Lessons from Oregon in Embracing Complexity in End-of-Life Care. *New England Journal of Medicine*. No. 376, Mar. 2017, pp. 1078-1082.

<sup>2</sup> Bailey A & Periyakoil VJ. (2018). Home Hospice: Home Care of the Dying Patient. Stanford School of Medicine. Available at <https://palliative.stanford.edu/home-hospice-home-care-of-the-dying-patient/where-do-americans-die/>.

<sup>3</sup> Wood J & McCarthy J. (2017). Majority of Americans Remain Supportive of Euthanasia. Gallup, May 3-7, 2017. Available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/211928/majority-americans-remain-supportive-euthanasia.aspx>.