



**HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
AND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEES**

FEBRUARY 16, 2024

HOUSE BILL 403

END-OF-LIFE OPTION ACT

(THE HONORABLE ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS AND THE HONORABLE SHANE E. PENDERGRASS ACT)

TESTIMONY OF RABBI ARIEL SADWIN

OPPOSE

Agudath Israel of America and its Maryland office speaks on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community across Maryland – and nationally – on matters of government affairs and public policy. For the last 85 years, Agudath Israel has been the voice for “culturally sensitive health and end-of-life advocacy and counseling” for American Orthodox Jewry.

The Orthodox Jewish community of Maryland firmly and unequivocally opposes House Bill 403 – the Hon. Elijah E. Cummings and the Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass End-of-Life Option Act.

While the merits of this issue have been debated for more than two thousand years, classical Jewish tradition teaches us that all human life is sacred without any exception. Any laws that are enacted to undermine the sanctity of human life, sends a message that is profoundly dangerous for all of society.

It is of the most basic principles of Jewish law and ethics, that “man does not possess absolute title to his life or body”, for that belongs to the Almighty G-D. We firmly believe that recognition of that fact has served as one of the pillars of civilized societies throughout all of the generations. That pillar is now in peril.

There are far too many people who suffer from terrible and dreadful illness, and we all know so many who have been affected by their suffering. Both proponents and opponents have shared many personal examples of loved ones who have suffered terribly for reasons man will never be able to comprehend. And while it may seem for some that they are better off dead than to remain alive, that is not a statement that *any of us* can firmly state.

However, for anyone to sanction a way for someone to hasten or bring about one’s death prematurely – to that we are firmly opposed. Our community is emphatically supportive of advanced medical directives – where a person and their family can set their treatment preferences

and when to decide when and how not to continue pursuing treatment to fight illness, etc., but that isn't the item being debated in this bill.

The Holy Talmud relates instances where a person is in the throes of death. It clearly and emphatically rules that one is not allowed to touch the person, lest he be involved in hastening the moment of death.

It is G-D himself who determines when we are to be born and when we are to die. It is not our doctor who takes the place of G-D to make those decisions. It is not our family members who make those decisions. And it is not ourselves.

On a very personal note, rarely does a day go by when I don't think about a person who had a profound impact on my own life, our family rabbi growing up in Silver Spring. He had just turned 60 when he was diagnosed with the ever-dreadful pancreatic cancer. After surgery and extensive treatment, the disease went into remission, only to return with a vengeance not long after. All of the treatment that he had sustained while he was still strong had taken a deadly toll on his body. All the while he continued to persevere and tried to remain as active and involved in the community as he was physically capable, and *beyond*.

In his own holy words delivered in his last public appearance, he said that if he was going to die it would be "with his boots on", i.e. still living life to its fullest – in as meaningful a way as possible. Now, several years later, an entire community of hundreds of households still draws strength from the way that man lived....and, how he died.

We request that you report unfavorably on House Bill 403 – Thank you.