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Baltimore District

House Bill 403– End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)

Health and Government Operations and Judiciary Committees

February 16, 2024

OPPOSE

Background: House Bill 403, if enacted, would repeal the State’s ban on physician-assisted suicide. It would allow a patient’s attending physician to determine if a person is terminally ill and decide whether the patient requires a psychological exam. If the patient meets the criteria, is over 18 years of age, and is a Maryland resident, they may request a prescription for life-ending drugs. The patient must request three times: request 1 is oral; request 2 is in writing and signed by the individual and two witnesses, one of whom may not work for the patient, be a relative, or in any way benefit by the death of the patient; request 3 is oral, at least 15 days after the initial oral request and at least 48 hours after the written request. At least one of the requests must be made in private with the doctor. The bill also requires a second opinion from a specialist or someone with “experience” to confirm the patient has a terminal illness and whether he or she requires a psychological exam. The patient must self-administer the prescription. Any pharmacist, doctor, or healthcare facility need not participate if they object, and there is no penalty for non-participation. If the patient takes the medication and dies, he or she is declared dead by *natural causes* on the death certificate.

Written Testimony: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) has a long-standing policy position opposing assisted suicide. The policy position was adopted in 1997 and reaffirmed in 2015. While we understand that this is a personal issue for many people in Maryland, on significant life-impacting principles that are deeply rooted in Jewish heritage, doctrine and tradition, the BJC is directed by our Jewish spiritual leadership. We believe that all life is sacred and that we are all created in the image of God. Suicide is a violation of Jewish law, as is assisting in a suicide. We are extremely supportive of end-of-life planning, such as advanced directives, and withholding or withdrawing impediments to the natural process of dying.

With this in mind, the Baltimore Jewish Council asks for an **unfavorable** report on HB 403.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of THE ASSOCIATED: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.

