

**Testimony by Cantor/Chaplain Michael Zoosman in Support of
Maryland End-of-Life Option Act (H.B. 403/SB443)**

My name is Cantor Michael Zoosman, a resident of 9507 49th Place, College Park, MD (PG County). This letter is in support of Maryland's consideration of legalizing Medical Aid in Dying (MAID).

I am a fully ordained member of the Jewish clergy (a cantor), a former prison chaplain, a third-generation Holocaust survivor and the co-founder of "L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty," a group of over 3,200 members. For the past eleven years, I have served as a multi-faith chaplain at the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, which includes coverage of a hospice. I have worked regularly with the dying. I am a board-certified chaplain with Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC).

Based on my vast experience as a spiritual care provider for those facing a terminal illness, I believe strongly that terminally ill Marylanders should have the freedom to choose a peaceful death in the face of intolerable suffering. That's why I'm asking you to support the Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act. Washington, D.C. and 10 other states allow MAID, starting with Oregon in 1997, so it's time/overdue for Maryland residents to have the same gentle dying option.

I personally have a chaplain colleague whose terminally ill father shot himself to death when he realized he could not get MAID. There was no dignity for him or for his family.

Some might feel that as a dedicated death penalty abolitionist, I might be against MAID as this is a violation of the right of life. This could not be farther from the truth. The issue here is one of consent - a subject that I have studied and observed immensely in my work at the NIH, which requires all patients to have demonstrated their informed consent in order to be treated. With very few exceptions, the overwhelming majority of execution victims do not "volunteer" or give their consent to be put to death, nor are they terminally ill and facing imminent suffering in the dying process. Those who choose MAID are doing just that: *choosing* this, by their own volition and of sound mind, as vetted by physicians. Just as all human beings have a right to life as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so too do those human beings have a right in the circumstances delineated above to choose how they wish to end their lives with dignity.

MAID should be a private, personal decision that reflects an individual's values and is free from government interference. Please give those who are suffering end-of-life options by passing MAID legislation this session.

My sincere thanks to Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Chair, Senator William C. Smith, Jr., or House Health & Government Operations Committee Chair, Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, and committee members for considering your written testimony.

If you have any questions, my contact information is below.

Cantor Michael Zoosman, MSM, BCC

Board Certified Chaplain (NAJC)

Former Jewish Prison Chaplain

Co-Founder: "L'chaim! Jews Against the Death Penalty"

(Pronouns: he, him, his)

Blogging at [The Times of Israel](#)

