

Statement In Support of HB0403/SB0443 - Rev. Paul Smith

Good afternoon, Chair Peña-Melnyk, sponsor Hill and members of the committee. For the record, I am Rev. Dr. Paul Smith, Pastor Emeritus of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn Heights, and a resident of Silver Spring. I have been active in the civil rights movement since the 1950s, working alongside my friends and mentors Andrew Young and Martin Luther King Jr. I have been in ministry since 1960.

I am here today in support of Senate Bill 443, the Maryland End of Life Option Act, which would authorize medical aid in dying in our state.

This legislation would give a terminally ill, mentally competent adult the option to request a prescription for life-ending medication that they can self-ingest — when and if they choose — to ease their fear of pain and reduce their suffering at the end of their life. It is a compassionate option, already available in 10 other states and Washington DC.

The terminally ill face a choice, not about death, but about life. When we are preoccupied with the fear of a painful death, we cannot spend our final days to the fullest. In my experience in helping others, I've seen firsthand that the fear of prolonged pain and suffering often creates greater anxiety and distress than the prospect of death itself. While few will ultimately choose to avail themselves of medical aid in dying, the availability of this compassionate option is itself palliative.

When dying persons have alternatives — a final measure of control over their pain and suffering — they feel a sense of comfort and peace that allows them to truly live during their last days. This is the greatest gift we can grant our dying friends and loved ones.

I've often said that I am comfortable in my belief that death is not the worst thing that can happen to me. Wherever God is, that's where I want to be. I am prepared to give my consent to death when my time comes, and when it does, I want another option in the end. And I will be with God.

We must offer a humane and self-empowering option for terminally ill adults to end their suffering. We must authorize medical aid in dying. I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 443.

Thank you