



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20515

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February 12, 2019

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***Compassion at the End of our Lives***  
***The End of Life Option Act: HB 399 / SB 311***

Dear Colleagues & Friends – I have been informed that you would welcome my thoughts regarding the *End of Life Option Act*, proposed for enactment by the 2019 Maryland General Assembly. Despite my general reluctance to interject my personal views into decisions that, under our federal system, are properly within your discretion, I have decided to respond.

I do so, in part, because, like many of you, I have reached a time in my own life when I have experienced the loss of far too many people whom I admired and loved – some who suffered for months knowing that they were about to die. As I recall these losses for you, I must acknowledge that my prayer for those dying loved ones, deprived of any reasonable hope for a prolonged life, was for a respectful and compassionate end to their suffering – and a swift journey to that better place that is promised to all people of faith.

I say this to you in full knowledge that there are those among us whose conscience can never accept that any person should have the right to choose the manner and time of their passing, even when facing death in the very near term. My reading of the proposed legislation is that it would respect and extensively protect those determinations of conscience, both for the terminally ill person and for all others who may become involved.

It seems to me, however, that the critical issue addressed by *The End of Life Option Act* is different, both morally and constitutionally. It is the question of who has the right to choose.

The Act would recognize that the constitutional right to privacy in Maryland includes the right of a terminally ill human being – legally competent, fully informed and protected from coercion – to choose the manner and time of their passing. It would recognize and declare that, at the end of life, an individual's right to self-determination about one of the most personal decisions that anyone could make supersedes the moral sensibilities of others.

As a just and compassionate society, we cannot value life in the abstract and deny to those who are about to die the self-determination that they deserve. For these reasons, I commend and support those who would enact this reform in our laws, and at your discretion, I would welcome the inclusion of these comments in the record of your proceedings.

Respectfully submitted,

Elijah Cummings