

Statement to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Re: Senate Bill 701 – “End-of-Life Option Act”

Friday, February 28th, 2018

OPPOSE



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The Maryland Association of Centers for Independent Living (MACIL) includes seven nonprofit organizations designed, governed and staffed by people with disabilities. We are part of a nationwide network of Centers for Independent Living providing the following core services: Information and Referral; Advocacy; Peer Support; Independent Living Skills training and Transition Services. Centers for Independent Living are resource and advocacy centers that promote independent living and equal access for people of all ages with all types of disabilities residing in Maryland.

MACIL is opposed to SB 701 the End-of-Life Options Act.

Under the proposed legislation, individuals can request physician-assisted suicide if a doctor has diagnosed them with a terminal illness and six months or less to live. This type of prognosis is nearly impossible to accurately predict. Individuals who have been injured in accidents or acquire serious illnesses are often viewed by health care providers as not having a quality of life so therefore are deemed terminal. Diagnoses of terminal illness are too often wrong, leading people to give up on treatment and lose good years of their lives.

People with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, or diagnosed with ALS or Muscular Dystrophy, can be viewed as individuals who are terminal. To offer end of life options to individuals facing these diagnoses is counterproductive to encouraging them to learning to live their lives in a different way. Centers for Independent Living believe all individuals with disabilities can live a life of quality. People needing significant support for regular life activities can still live fully integrated and independent lives in their own homes with long term supports and services. Steps that could address the person’s concerns with home care services to relieve feelings of burdening family, should be explored with the individual rather than assisted suicide and Centers for Independent Living can assist with this.

An additional concern on this legislation is that it does not require doctors to give patients a screening for depression before providing physician assisted suicide. People who want to die often have treatable depression or possibly need better palliative care. In addition, individuals facing a significant illness or new disability likely need suicide prevention information and connections to others who live in similar situations. Individuals facing a new way of life need support in understanding and dealing with a loss of autonomy and dignity, loss of control of bodily functions. These are all disability issues dealt with in the disability community daily.

MACIL feels there are no alternatives for death and the unintended consequences of this legislation can never be undone.