SB 701/ HB 643
"Richard E. Israel and Roger "Pip" Moyer"
End-of-Life Options Act
OPPOSED - VOTE NO

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Thank you for allowing me to express my opposition to SB 701

The people wearing the sticker that says – "My Life, My Death" think this is a personal choice that does not effect anyone else but that is simply not true. If you pass this law, it would have an impact on my family.

My mother-in-law has melanoma that spread to her lymph glands. She was given 6 months to live and like most people, she was afraid of what the future would hold. More than once she said she just wanted to die, esp. after one of her friends died. She couldn't see a reason to go on living. That is one problem with this bill. The patient could get the prescription when they are not depressed, but later something could happen that puts them into despair.

If this becomes law and she gets the lethal drugs, she could commit suicide simply because she is having a bad day. Thankfully, she does not have this option , and even though she was diagnosed with less than 6 months to live and continues to fight cancer, she is still with us, 4 1/2years later.

My concern is not only for my mother-in-law. During this same time our teenage daughter developed anxiety and depression. Her high school counselor informed us she planned to kill herself by overdosing on pills. As a result, we sought help for her and we were told to put all our medications under lock and key.

If you pass this law, it would pose an immediate threat to my mother-in-law and my daughter. How would I protect my daughter from access to my mother-in-law's medication? If my mother-in-law ends her life because she is depressed and feeling low, how I can explain to my daughter that she should not do the same thing?

Can a law be good for one person and bad for another?

(Hold up Picture)Attached to my written testimony is a copy of this story from our local newspaper, The Capital, that glorified the suicide of a woman in CA with ALS. This woman sent out invitations to her own death party that was held at sunset overlooking the beach with her closest friends.

This story makes me physically ill as I remember my daughter telling me how she wanted her funeral. Some kids dream about the best way to die and it does not help when the news makes suicide look like some great thing.

Vote against SB 701 to protect my daughter from danger, my mother-in-law from bad days, and the people in Maryland from a law which forces all of us to consider suicide as a medically approved healthcare option when we are terminally ill.

The Sunday Capital
Health&Fitness
D3
SUNDAY
Aug. 28, 2016
CAPITALGAZETTE.COM

A graceful means to an end

Terminally ill woman had one rule: No crying

By Lindsey Bever
The Washington Post

NIELS ALPERT/AP PHOTOS

Family and friends take ALS sufferer Betsy Davis, center, to a friend's new Tesla for a ride up a California hillside to end her life at her farewell party.

Kestrin Pantera plays her cello at the weekend going-away party for Davis in July.

Her death, much like her life, would be a work of art.

Betsy Davis sat in her bedroom in Ojai, a valley town surrounded by the California mountains.

Her caregivers routinely placed her iPad on her lap, and she would type, slowly poking the keypad with her pinkie.

This time, she was writing an invitation for her farewell party.

"First, you are all very brave for sending me off on my journey," she wrote in a July email to family members and friends. "Thank you so much for traveling the physical and emotional distance for me. These circumstances are unlike any party you have attended before, requiring emotional stamina, centeredness, and openness. I strongly encourage you all to connect with every person at the party — this will not only benefit you but me as well."

Three years earlier, Davis had been diagnosed with ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease, a merciless illness that renders muscles unusable and speech unrecognizable.

Davis did not want to experience death the way the disease typically demands, her family and friends said; she wanted to celebrate her life — eating favorite foods, listening to favorite music and reliving favorite memories with those who meant the most to her — then slip away surrounded by love and support.

"There are no rules," she wrote. "Wear what you want. Speak your mind. Dance, hop, chant, sing, pray ... but do not cry in front of me. Okay, one rule. But it is important to me that our last interactions in this dimension are joyful and light. If you need to cry, there will be designated crying areas ... or just find a corner."

But, she told them, "I AM allowed to cry."

"One of the symptoms of ALS is uncontrollable laughing/crying. So, in effect, I'm not crying because of you, but merely because my neurons are having a meltdown. However, if I laugh, it probably is because of you."

ALS, which stands for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a neurodegenerative disease that afflicts some 20,000 Americans at any given time, according to the ALS Association. On average, those who have been diagnosed with ALS are expected to live two to five years, the association says.

In recent years, terminally ill patients like Davis have drawn attention to the much-debated issue of right-to-die legislation. Currently, four states have death with dignity laws: Oregon, Washington, Vermont and California, whose End of Life Option Act took effect in June.

California's new law states that the patient must be at least 18 years old, terminally ill and expected to die within six months. The patient must also be mentally capable of making the decision to die and physically capable of self-administering the aid-in-dying drug, according to the law.

Davis, a 41-year-old artist with wavy red hair, freckled skin and an appreciation of beauty, had to use a wheelchair, having lost muscle control in her legs. She was struggling to use her hands, to speak, to swallow.

She decided it was time, her family and friends said, and she set the date for a two-day celebration at her Ojai home.

"What she really wanted was for everyone to reconnect," said her sister Kelly Davis, adding, "I think she knew what she was doing; she was creating a support group."

On the weekend of July 23-24, more than 30 people came from across the country for what Davis called her "rebirth." They arrived at a home filled with mementos from her life: artwork, books, clothing and keepsakes from her worldwide travels, such as desert sand from Jordan and incense from Japan.

Each item had a blue Post-it note stuck to it with a name of a friend she wanted to pass it down to.

Davis asked her friends to try on her clothes and take items they wanted, Kelly Davis said. Some men in the group tried on her dresses, Kelly Davis said, and modeled them to make her laugh.

They listened to Brit pop and indie rock, including New Order and the Pixies.

They watched a film, "Dance of Reality," by Chilean director Alejandro Jodorowsky.

They huddled together on her porch, where friends played the harmonica and the cello.

And, at times, some of them stepped away and cried.

Kelly Davis said it was "really remarkable how joyful everything was," but that, every so often, she would have a "reality check" about how the party would end.

"I would look at my watch and say, 'In five hours, my sister will no longer be living,' " she said, crying. "You just have to accept it. You just have to acknowledge it and move on."

That Sunday night, as the sun started to set, Davis headed toward a hillside outside her home with her family and friends to watch the sky turn pink.

First, Davis told her father that he had always been her hero, Kelly Davis said. And she told her sister, who is a journalist, "Don't stop trying to make the world a better place."

Betsy Davis' caregivers helped her slip into a blue-and-white kimono that she had bought during a bucket-list trip to Japan. A family friend drove her up the hill in his new Tesla.

There, her family members and closest friends sat in chairs under a white canopy facing California's setting sun.

Her caregivers helped her onto a bed, where she would soon take a cocktail of morphine, pentobarbital and chloral hydrate mixed into a coconut milkshake to "mask the taste," her sister wrote in the Voice of San Diego.

One by one, friends who could bear it said their goodbyes.

It was the only time all weekend Davis cried, her sister said.

With only her physician and her family by her side, Davis chugged the concoction, lay down and, almost immediately, slipped into a "peaceful" sleep, a four-hour coma before her eventual death, her sister said.

Kelly Davis called it "a surreal moment" to witness.

"I sat with her about an hour," she said. "I felt like after an hour, she was gone, that her spirit was gone."