



**Anita Cameron's Testimony
Opposing Maryland SB 701
Friday, February 28, 2020**

Committee Chair, and Members. Good afternoon. Thank you very much for allowing me to offer my thoughts to you today.

My name is Anita Cameron. I am a 54-year-old with multiple disabilities, two of which are degenerative, and one which will take my life. I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 701, the End of Life Option Act.

This bill is a physician assisted suicide bill. It is important to be up front and honest about what this is. Couching it in pretty language is disingenuous at best, and dangerous, at worst.

I am Director of Minority Outreach for Not Dead Yet, a national disability rights organization opposed to physician assisted suicide and euthanasia as deadly forms of discrimination against people with disabilities. I live in Rochester, New York, but work with people of color and marginalized communities around the nation.

My primary reason for opposition to this bill and others like it is that disabled BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People Of Color) are at particular risk of being harmed by it.

Our health care system is inherently racist. Studies show that Blacks and people of color receive inferior medical treatment compared to Whites. We are less likely to receive adequate treatment for heart conditions, diabetes, cancer and chronic pain. Oregon has made it clear that a person whose condition becomes terminal because they don't receive healthcare they need would be eligible for assisted suicide.

The lives of people with disabilities are largely devalued by doctors and society, in general, particularly if we are living in poverty. The lives of BIPOC with disabilities are even more devalued due to racism and stereotypes about our communities.

Although assisted suicide requests in Oregon (which this bill and others are modeled on) are lower among Blacks and people of color, that doesn't mean that this won't change in more diverse areas, especially as healthcare faces cuts and assisted suicide becomes more acceptable due to well-funded efforts of groups like Compassion and Choices. In fact, though the numbers are small and increases are incremental, there has already been a rise in the number of assisted suicide requests from people of color in California and Colorado since their laws went into effect.

Another reason for my opposition is that doctors would be the gatekeepers of people's



lives under this bill, and can decide for you about your quality of life. Anyone can request assisted suicide, but a doctor decides who gets suicide prevention and who gets suicide assistance. And since the top five reasons people request assisted suicide in Oregon are related to disability, like feelings of being a burden on others, it's clear that doctors see disability concerns as good reasons to prescribe lethal drugs.

Further, doctors often make mistakes about whether a person is terminal or not. In June, 2009, while living in Washington state, my mother was determined to be in the final stages of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and placed in hospice. Two months later, I was told that her body had begun the process of dying. My mother wanted to go home to Colorado to die, so the arrangements were made. A funny thing happened, though. Once she got there, her health began to improve! Over ten years later, she is still alive, lives in her own home in the community and is reasonably active.

Because of the racist nature of our health care system and the tendency of doctors to devalue the lives of disabled and people of color, assisted suicide has no place in Maryland's healthcare system.

Please vote NO on SB 701.