

Douglas W. Heinrichs, M.D.
10220 Clubhouse Court
Ellicott City, MD 21042
dwheinrichs@gmail.com
410-913-0360

March 12, 2023

Re: Letter from Maryland Psychiatric Society to the Committees

The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair, Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Dear Delegates Pena-Melnyk and Clippinger:

I am a psychiatrist and member of the Maryland Psychiatric Association (MPS) and its legislative committee. I testified at the March 10 hearing as a private individual in support of HB933 and submitted written testimony to both the House and the Senate. I am deeply distressed to find out the Maryland Psychiatric Society leadership contacted you and other committee members claiming that Dr. Michael Strauss, in his testimony, misrepresented the 2022 MPS survey on this issue, as well as challenging the legitimacy of citing an unpublished survey. As the person who pressed the MPS to conduct the survey and had some role in its design, I want to respond. Furthermore, I also cited the same results in my oral and written testimony. I stand by his and my testimony.

There were two survey items directed to the issue of medical aid in dying for terminally ill patients. The first: **"In principle, a person in this situation should have the right to elect to end their life." To that, 76.4% supported (47.7% agree and 28.7% somewhat agree), compared to 21.8% opposed (11.5% disagree, 10.3% somewhat disagree). Only 1.7% responded no opinion.** The second: **"Physicians should be allowed to prescribe lethal medication to these patients." To that, 57.4% supported (26.7% agree and 30.7% somewhat agree) compared to 37.5% opposed (27.3% disagree, 10.2% somewhat disagree). Only 5.11% chose no opinion.** Combining "agree" and "somewhat agree" and similarly with the disagree categories, is the standard way to summarize this sort of data, particularly as a "no opinion" category was offered to anyone wanting to express neutrality.

The fact that the survey was not published is irrelevant to its results. For this sort of survey, a response rate of 23% is quite good. I believe the survey was not published because the results were not pleasing to the MPS leadership. I received a copy of the survey results without any indication that the results were privileged or confidential in any way, nor is there any reason they should be. **The survey results should belong to the membership, and we should be free to share them with whomever we wish.** I shared these results with several interested parties, including Dr. Strauss. I believe that was an appropriate and fully ethical action.

The fact that the survey did not specifically assess members' position on a specific piece of legislation is also irrelevant. **My testimony and that of Dr. Strauss only indicated the results as being in support of medical aid in dying, not specifically of HB 933.**

Sincerely,



Douglas W Heinrichs, M.D.

Cc: Members House Government and Operations & Judiciary Committees