

Testimony by Diane Rehm
In Support of the Maryland End-of-Life Option Act
(The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E.
Pendergrass Act, SB 845/HB 933)
Joint Committee on Health and Government Operations
March 7, 2023

Good afternoon.

I am grateful to have this opportunity to speak with you in support of the Maryland End-Life Option Act.

Most people I know hope they will die in their sleep, peacefully and without pain.

Unfortunately, when my husband of 54 years, John Rehm, died, that was not his experience.

In June 2014, when John was 83, he was placed under hospice care in a Maryland nursing home.

His doctor had concluded that he had six months or less to live.

That's when John told his physician that — because Parkinson's disease had so affected him that he could no longer use his hands, arms, or legs, because he could no longer stand, walk, eat, bathe, or in any way care for himself on his own — he was now ready to end what was becoming a prolonged dying process.

He knew how Parkinson's would take away the dignity of his life, and he knew the physical and mental suffering that was to come.

He declared to me, his children, and his physician that he was "ready to die."

But when his physician explained that he was unable to carry out John's wishes in the state of Maryland, John became very angry.

He said, "I feel betrayed."

Then his doctor explained that the only alternative John had if he wished to end his suffering, was to stop eating, drinking fluids, and taking medications.

He asked his physician how long the dying process would last and was told it could be 10 days to two weeks.

The very next day, my husband began his journey to the end.

He ceased drinking fluids, taking medications, or eating any food whatsoever.

I sat by my husband's side as he slowly died.

The legislation you are considering may have permitted John Rehm and so many others to have the measure of autonomy that he wanted over his own death.

His own death.

I absolutely believe that laws permitting medical aid in dying affirm every individual's precious right to autonomy at the end of life.

And so, again I thank you for hearing from me today.

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