

Testimony Opposing HB933

To the Honorable Members of the House,

Thank you for the opportunity give testimony on House Bill 933- End of Life Option Act. My name is Becky Ford and I strongly oppose this bill.

Viktor Frankl once wrote, “When we are no longer able to change our situation- we are challenged to change ourselves”. In 2019, after writing letters to the House, using the example of my best friend who had Stage IV Pancreatic Cancer, I then only wrote a letter to one person in the Senate- former Senate President Mike Miller. I forwarded him what the members of the House Committee received, and I told him he knew this was wrong. I worked for Senator Miller while attending Anne Arundel Community College, for his political fundraiser. I knew he had the ability to work with both parties. He kindly mailed me back a letter that I will treasure forever and said that as long as he was there, this bill would never pass. If you want to leave a legacy, just look at the work of Senator Miller. And he’s a pivotal role model for this bill, he fought his cancer, he stepped down as Senate President, but still served as a Senator until he no longer could. He passed away with terminal cancer, surrounded by his family.

I have chronic major depression, anxiety with panic attacks, and PTSD. No, it’s not fair. I can’t do everything that everyone else can all the time, but I know as hard as it is, I, like so many others with any chronic, or terminal disease, am a pioneer. Maybe life is more challenging for certain people, but it’s those people that help the advances in healthcare. It’s those who take on that suffering, whose strength is relentless that will help save lives, or make things better of those who get the same diagnosis in the future.

But I, too, know what it's like to want to give up. Physician Assisted Suicide is not the answer. It's a permanent choice that can't be changed. I know this because I am a multiple suicide survivor. In April 2011, police were called to my home by my psychiatrist. I thought they were there to see my Dad, a Natural Resource Police Officer, I had taken pills and drank...a lot. My psychiatrist told them to look at the texts on my phone I had sent him, which apparently the last one I had sent him was, "I'm dead, so very dead". My father was called by headquarters, and he rushed home to find officers he taught in the police academy, and I never felt more ashamed for doing such a thing to embarrass him. It's called a Section 29, when your forced to go to the hospital, and that's how I ended up at Dorchester General Hospital. My medication dosage was increased, things got better.

I moved to the North Shore of Massachusetts in July of 2012. But in May of 2013, I was Sectioned 29'd, again. Taken to a hospital in Massachusetts, Memorial Day weekend. So, the 72-hour hold, under Massachusetts state law didn't count on weekends, or holidays, meaning a much longer stay. Again, medications were changed. I left.

There have been more recent times I have been suicidal, or have had suicidal ideation. The danger of physician assisted suicide for someone like me, someone with chronic depression, who doesn't know on any given day when they'll wake up in that black hole is that if this becomes an option for the terminally ill, it will become an option for those with chronic conditions, too. That's not the solution I want, or one for insurance to ever push on me. If the healthcare system gives up on me when I've already given up on myself, then that's incredibly

dangerous. Because the ripple effect is one that is too far reaching. Too many people can get hurt. No one is a burden, those of us with various diagnoses, we're the strong ones. But most mood disorders are often an invisible illness. And often, you put on a fake smile, and no one knows what's really going on.

Suicide is not the way out. It leaves people behind wondering why. We're each given a purpose in life, sometimes it's very hard to figure out what that is. If I had succeeded, I'd have missed out on so much. I'd have left a family behind and a boatload of things on my bucket list. For those who think this is death with dignity, no, it's death that's fast and permanent, and there is regret. I absolutely regret the choices I made, giving up. I'm worth something, even when I don't always feel that way. And I am thankful that I am still here to advocate and pester on the issues that matter most.

We are allowed to feel messed up and inside out. But it doesn't mean we're defective - it just means we're human.

Each of you were elected into office to serve your districts. The best way to do that is to ensure that everyone has access to the best treatments, they have access to get their prescriptions, that mental health services are available to everyone, and to know that every constituent and person you encounter has worth. The very first inalienable right in the Declaration of Independence is life! Please do not pass this bill.

Thank you.