

February 23, 2023

Senator Will Smith, Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Delegate Joselyn Peña-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Delegate Luke Clippinger, Chair, Judiciary Committee
Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Elijah Cummings' Unwavering Support for the End-of-Life Options Act

One of the hardest things my late husband Elijah Eugene Cummings ever said to me was, "I am ready to die." Suffering from medical complications related to kidney disease, thymic cancer, and a heart valve transplant, Elijah and I had had a number of extended hospital stays over the previous two and a half years prior to his death. But this time was different. After the doctor informed us that they had run out of treatment options for him, Elijah asked me to find a hospice where he could spend his last days on earth.

A deeply religious man, the son of two preachers, who practiced the Christian faith his entire life, Elijah took the path of accepting a natural end to his life no matter how painful and dispiriting it was. But as a University of Maryland trained lawyer and a long-serving legislator, Elijah was nothing if not practical. He understood that the personal faith beliefs guiding his end-of-life choice may not be right for others who might make different choices, perhaps because they follow other faith traditions or none at all.

Elijah believed it was his duty to ensure that the law provided people of different backgrounds and beliefs with end-of-life options. Indeed, he felt the protection of the law was critical regarding this matter given the complex and delicate nature of the factors shaping end-of-life decisions.

For this reason, Elijah firmly supported the End-of-Life Option Act, which gives terminally ill persons in Maryland the right to determine when and how they end their lives. The Act offers a clear process for applying for medical aid in dying and for defining terminal illness, has appropriate guidelines for assessing the mental capacity of the patient, and conscientious procedures for ensuring that there is no coercion or abuse involved in the patient's decision-making process. Licensed medical professionals are involved every step of the way. Finally, people who do not want to die in this way are not compelled to apply for this program. It is completely optional.

End-of-life decisions are deeply personal. Marylanders who are suffering from terminal illnesses deserve the right to choose when and how they end their lives. The Maryland legislature must respect their dignity and right to self-determination by passing the End-of-Life Option Act.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration.

Sincerely,



Maya Rockey Moore Cummings, Ph.D.