



COMMISSION ON AGING

March 10, 2023

HB 933 SUPPORT

Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee

Dear Delegates Pena-Melnyk and Cullison:

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging (CoA) in support of HB 933 (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act) that would authorize an individual, under very specific circumstances, to request aid in dying.

The CoA is authorized by the Older Americans Act, P.L. 116131, and was established by Montgomery County in 1974 to advise County government on the needs, interests, and issues of concern to its older residents, and to advocate on their behalf at the local, state and national levels.

We are aware, that for some individuals and groups the provisions of this bill may be antithetical to their personal convictions and beliefs. The CoA did not come to its decision to support HB 933 lightly. We held open meetings on this issue at the committee and full Commission levels. We carefully reviewed the proposed legislation, as well as the hearing transcripts and testimony from the previous years' legislation to better understand the arguments, both pro and con. After extensive deliberations, we have agreed that HB 933 allows people who are nearing the end of life to die in peace if they meet specific requirements spelled out in the legislation and, importantly, if it is their desire to do so.

The proposed legislation has numerous safeguards to ensure that this is an entirely voluntary process on the part of the individual and that there is no duress or coercion from any source. Further, there are provisions to ensure that the individual has the capacity to make this decision and that the individual may also change his/her mind at any time. The proposed legislation offers an option to a gravely ill, but mentally competent, person while leaving in place other options that are already available. This is an issue of bodily autonomy and people at the end of life deserve this option. Furthermore, it also is an issue of compassion. Sometimes, palliative care or hospice simply do not end an individual's suffering or improve their quality of life.

In conclusion, the Montgomery County Commission on Aging strongly supports HB 933. When hospice and palliative care are no longer effective for a person who has 6 months or fewer to live, that person should have the option to obtain prescription medication so they can die peacefully on their own terms. The State of Maryland should join the ten other states and the District of Columbia to allow this option so individuals may choose not to live the end of their life in intolerable pain and suffering.

Thank you for your attention to our views. We hope you will give them favorable consideration.

Sincerely,
David Engel
David Engel, Chair

Department of Health and Human Services

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