



Hearing Date: March 7, 2023

Testimony on SB0845 – POSITION: FAVORABLE

End-of-Life Option Act

(The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)

To: Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: The Jewish Community Relations Council, Howard County, MD

Betsy Singer and Laura Salganik, Co-chairs

Presented by: David Marker, Member JCRC Executive Committee

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County is submitting this testimony in support of SB0845, the Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass End-of-Life Options Act. The bill is also supported by most Jewish clergy serving Howard County including:

- Rabbi Gordon Fuller, President of the Jewish Federation of Howard County
- Rabbi Craig Axler
- Rabbi Michael Hess Webber
- Rabbi Daniel Plotkin
- Rabbi Daria Jacobs Veldt
- Hazzan Stephanie Weishaar

The JCRC represents the approximately 25,000 Jews throughout our County, including members of seven congregations and four Chabad centers. We are aware that much of the opposition to this bill have come from people of faith, claiming that their religious tradition causes them to oppose end-of-life options. The JCRC is here to state that while that may be true for some traditions, our Jewish tradition leads us to welcome and strongly support adoption of the Elijah Cummings and Shane Pendergrass End-of-Life Options Act.

Jewish texts have long opposed suicide. But they have also demonstrated an understanding, and even support, for those in desperate situations who need assistance, even with their own death. When the Talmud and Aggadah were written over 1,000 years ago the average life expectancy was 20-40 years, due to pestilence and famine. Those Sages taught that dying after more than seven days was suffering, and only described death taking “ten or twenty days.” They did not consider modern medicine and health care making the suffering spread across months or years.

The Talmud has multiple cases where it describes both praying for someone to live and praying for them to die. It also contains multiple stories supporting people who choose to hasten their death (and assist others in doing it), for example when Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon is martyred by the Romans following the Bar Kochba revolt. As he is being wrapped in the torah and burned to death, he agrees with the executioner to speed it up so he will suffer less. Both are rewarded by God for their actions, including the executioner who assisted in his death.

While Judaism has always been a life centered faith, we understand that the spiritual needs of those suffering incurable conditions must also be considered. We believe our religion recognizes the difference between prolonging life or just postponing death and so we endorse this bill without hesitation or reservation.