



Secular Maryland

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SB 845 - SUPPORT

End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Under the proposed, carefully crafted, law, which Secular Maryland supports, terminally ill patients who are diagnosed to have six months to live and who are mentally competent to make their own medical care decisions may request a prescription of medication to hasten their deaths. These patients must also be able to self-administer the medication. The primary physician's diagnosis must also be certified by a consulting physician to guard against misdiagnosis.

Absent such a law, the practice is forced underground, exposing dying patients to possible abuse or coercion and doctors to possible prosecution and imprisonment. Limiting one's end-of-life options to suffering terrible physical and emotional agony and the loss of personal dignity or to starvation is not humane. Starvation typically takes several weeks to kill and can be unpleasant.

The proposed law protects the rights of patients and physicians by requiring the adult patient who is a resident of Maryland to verbally request the deadly overdose prescription from the physician twice; each request is separated by 15 days, to make a written request to the attending physician; the request is witnessed by two individuals who are not primary caregivers or both family members. It provides an option for the patient to rescind the verbal and written requests at any time. The attending physician must inform the patient of alternatives, including palliative care, hospice and pain management options. Use of this law cannot affect the status of a patient's health or life insurance policies. Similar laws on other states have produced good results.

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