

Testimony of Robert Brookland, MD
Support for SB845/HB933 The End-of-Life Option Act
(The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)
March 2023

I am Dr. Robert Brookland, a board-certified Radiation Oncologist and Chairman of the Department at GBMC. I strongly support this bill.

I have two comments.

- 1. You should pass this bill for the minority of patients whose pain and suffering cannot adequately be addressed.**

I have cared for thousands of cancer patients in my career. In most, my colleagues and I have been successful, either achieving cure or relieving symptoms. But in a small minority, our actions have been inadequate, and patients experienced profoundly debilitating pain and/or suffering, begging for a peaceful end. I could provide the specifics of many such examples, including family and friends, but I don't have the time. I will simply say it is patronizing and wrong for opponents of this bill to believe they are justified in stopping this small minority of patients from ending their lives with peace and dignity. They need and deserve this law.

- 2. It is reasonable and ethical for physicians to participate in such programs, and that participation does NOT violate the Hippocratic Oath.**

I cringe when opponents state this process violates the Hippocratic Oath, because in my mind they do not understand the entirety of the Oath. You should think about two different Hippocratic Oaths – the original from 2400 years ago and oaths administered today. There clearly are parts of the original oath relevant to today's practice of medicine that focus on not harming patients, following moral principles, and protecting confidentiality. My problem with opposing witnesses is that they "cherry-pick" one small part of the Oath when there are many parts that today are irrelevant or inappropriate. That original oath has one swear to the God Apollo, acknowledge only male physicians, and agree not to perform surgery, particularly

mentioning removing stones. The Oath precludes abortions, but under Maryland law physicians perform safe abortions upon proper informed consent and under accepted guidelines.

Now you should consider modern oaths. Fully 116 of 122 U.S. medical schools now administer oaths that accommodate medical aid in dying, including the updated oath for the Johns Hopkins Med School.

The entire focus of aid in dying involves an option, a conversation, interaction, evaluation, compassion, informed consent and, perhaps, a prescription within legally defined standards. Deciding to take the drug is the patient's option. To me, that is an ethical practice, and I support such laws.