

SB0443/HB0403 FAVORABLE

Testimony of Seth A. Morgan, MD, FAAN

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End-of-Life Option Act

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

February 8th, 2024 (Senate) and February 16, 2024 (House)

My name is Seth Morgan. I am a Board-Certified Fellow of the American Academy of Neurology, a cancer survivor, a person living with disabilities and an advocate for people with disabilities. I strongly support the passage of this bill.

The alarmist claims of the legislation’s opponents that people with disabilities are against medical aid in dying is wrong.

People with disabilities are not a monolithic group. Many are capable of making self-care decisions and do not need an umbrella advocacy group to speak for them. The disability rights and end-of-life care movements share the core values of self-determination, personal autonomy, and the right to independence. Concerns that medical aid in dying would lead to a “slippery slope” of abuse and coercion of people with disabilities are unfounded and disproven by over 26 years of experience since Oregon’s Death with Dignity Act passed in 1997. (1) The safeguards in the legislation are rigorous and preclude any individual with a cognitive disability from being eligible to use it.

Activists in the disability community (such as *Us for Autonomy*) are some of the strongest supporters of medical aid in dying. A recent study determined that one in ten politicians in the United States have disabilities underscoring that not all people with disabilities are unable to self-advocate or make personal health care decisions. (2)

Yes, there are individuals both with and without disabilities for whom the proposed legislation is not one they would want to avail themselves of. But, others might. The decision would be, and should be, solely in control of the dying individual.

79% of U.S. residents who self-identify as having a disability agree that “medical aid in dying should be legal for terminally ill, mentally capable adults who chose to self-ingest medication to die peacefully”. (3)

We are asking to be allowed a decision if the situation arose in which medical aid in dying was a legal option we could consider. For anyone for whom this is not an option they would want, no one will be forced to use it.

CITATIONS

- 1. Letter from Bob Joondeph, Executive Director, Disability Rights Oregon, February 14th 2019; Copy attached. Available from: <https://compassionandchoices.org/letter-from-disability-rights-oregon-dro/>**

2. Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations:
https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/fact_sheet_elected_officials_disabilities_2013_29_17.pdf
3. USA/National Public Opinion Survey of 1,004 respondents - Cross Tabulation Report, February 2023. Available from: <https://bit.ly/SPRNatDisabilityPoll2023>