

TASH Testimony in opposition to SB0443/HB0403 “End-of-Life Option Act”

February 8, 2024

My name is Michael Brogioli; I am a Marylander who serves as Executive Director of TASH, a national disability advocacy organization that seeks to advance equity, opportunity and inclusion for all people with disabilities with a focus on those with the most significant support needs.

TASH has long opposed physician-assisted suicide and therefore urges this committee and the Maryland Assembly at large to oppose the End-of-Life Option Act. We know that there is a long and ongoing history of discrimination against people with disabilities in medical and other settings, and that legalized assisted suicide further endangers people with disabilities who are disproportionately subject to abuse and neglect including documented history of the denial of basic rights and medical care, including nutrition and hydration. This proposed legislation underscores ableist beliefs about the value and quality of the lives of people with disabilities and is contrary to the purpose of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

There is compelling research that demonstrates that psychological and social distress are primary reasons for individuals to request assisted suicide. This distress undercuts the notion that requests for assisted suicide are truly ‘voluntary’ and fully informed. Experiences in other states such as Oregon and California demonstrate the dangers of assisted suicide and the inadequacy of purported safeguards. We are especially concerned that this legislation could put the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at extraordinary risk including through coercion and abuse and a lack of truly informed consent.

We urge legislators to consider existing alternatives to assisted suicide that respect the dignity and value of disabled lives, including legal alternatives that currently exist in all states on refusing treatment, on receiving pain medication, hospice care, and palliative care, all of which can effectively reduce and relieve discomfort and pain during the dying process.

Lastly, we are deeply concerned that legalized assisted suicide will indeed be a slippery slope that could result in covert and even overt pressure upon people with disabilities, especially those with the most significant support needs, who may already face stigma and discrimination based on their disabilities. The current system of health services, particularly managed care, provides economic incentives for rationing health care, and can lead to the encouragement of physician-assisted suicide. Thank for you this opportunity to state our opposition to this legislation.