

February 7, 2024

SB0443

End of Life Option Act

Senate Judicial Proceedings

Position: Oppose

I'm Anita Cameron, Director of Minority Outreach for Not Dead Yet, a national disability rights organization opposed to medical discrimination, healthcare rationing, euthanasia and assisted suicide.

I am writing in opposition to SB 0443 End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act).

This bill is dangerous because though this law is supposed to be for people with six months or less to live, doctors are sometimes wrong about a terminal diagnosis.

My mother, while living in Washington state, was determined to be at the end stage of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. I was told her death was imminent, that if I wanted to see her alive, I should get there in two days. She rallied, but was still quite ill, so she was placed in hospice. Her doctor said that her body had begun the process of dying.

Though she survived 6 months of hospice, her doctor convinced her that her body was still in the process of dying, and she moved home to Colorado to die.

My mum didn't die. She became active in her community and lived almost 12 years!

SB 0443 will put sick people, seniors and disabled people, especially, at risk due to the view of doctors that disabled people have a lower quality of life, therefore leading them to devalue our lives. Now add race and racial disparities in healthcare to this. Blacks, in particular, receive inferior health care compared to whites in the areas of cardiac care, diabetes, cancer and pain management.

As a Black Latina, I didn't see assisted suicide as part of my culture. This is borne out in a Pew Research Center study that shows Blacks and Latinos are 65% opposed to assisted suicide and in states where it's legal, rarely use the program. Assisted suicide proponents tend to be white professional and managerial class folks.

What's especially dangerous is that in states where it's legal, if you lose access to healthcare, turning your chronic condition into a terminal one, you can request assisted suicide. It'll be cheaper to kill you than to care for you.

Proponents speak of pain as their number one reason why they want assisted suicide, yet according to the data, pain or the fear of pain was not among the top five reasons people seek assisted suicide. That can be addressed by effective pain control, palliative care, hospice services and palliative sedation.

The 5 top reasons people ask for assisted suicide according to the Oregon data are:

Loss of autonomy

Loss of dignity

Loss of the ability to do things they once loved

Loss of bodily control, such as incontinence and vomiting

Feelings of being a physical, emotional or financial burden on family, friends and caregivers

All these are disability related issues that can be addressed with home based care, services and supports.

Assisted suicide laws are deadly public policy. As long as disability discrimination and racial disparities in healthcare exists, assisted suicide has no place in Maryland. Please vote no on SB 0443