



Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Testimony on: SB0443 – End of Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)
Organization: The Jewish Community Relations Council, Howard County, MD
Submitting: Betsy Singer and Laura Salganik, Co-chairs
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 8, 2024

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County (JCRC) is submitting this testimony in support of SB0443. The bill is also supported by most Jewish clergy serving Howard County including Rabbi Gordon Fuller, President of the Jewish Federation of Howard County, Rabbi Craig Axler, Rabbi Michael Hess Webber, Rabbi Daniel Plotkin, Rabbi Daria Jacobs Veldt, and Hazzan Stephanie Weishaar.

The JCRC represents the approximately 25,000 Jews throughout our County, including members of seven congregations and four Chabad centers. We are aware that much of the opposition to this bill has come from people of faith, stating that their religious tradition causes them to oppose end-of-life options. The JCRC is clarifying that while that may be true for some traditions, our Jewish tradition leads us to welcome and strongly support adoption of the Elijah Cummings and Shane Pendergrass End-of-Life Options Act.

Jewish texts have long opposed suicide. But they have also demonstrated an understanding, and even support, for those in desperate situations who need assistance, even with their own death. When the Talmud and Aggadah were written over 1,000 years ago, the average life expectancy was 20-40 years, due to pestilence and famine. Those Sages taught that dying after more than seven days was suffering, and only described death taking “ten or twenty days.” They did not consider modern medicine and health care making the suffering spread across months or years.

The Talmud has multiple cases where it describes both praying for someone to live and praying for them to die. It also contains multiple stories supporting people who choose to hasten their death (and assist others in doing it), for example when Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon is martyred by the Romans following the Bar Kochba revolt. As he is being wrapped in the torah and burned to death, he agrees with the executioner to speed it up so he will suffer less. Both are rewarded by God for their actions, including the executioner who assisted in his death.

While Judaism has always been a life centered faith, we understand that the spiritual needs of those suffering incurable conditions must also be considered. **We believe our religion recognizes the difference between prolonging life or just postponing death** and so we recommend a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 0443 without hesitation or reservation.