



YahalomMD

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SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 8, 2024

SENATE BILL 443

END-OF-LIFE OPTION ACT

(THE HONORABLE ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS AND THE HONORABLE SHANE E. PENDERGRASS ACT)

OPPOSE

Yahalom Maryland, a division of Agudath Israel of Maryland, serves as a point of contact for individuals, families, and local organizations within the Orthodox Jewish community who seek assistance in navigating issues related to physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. Today we speak on their behalf.

Yahalom Maryland stands in conjunction with the accepted consensus of disability advocacy groups in opposition to Senate Bill 443 – the Hon. Elijah E. Cummings and the Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass End-of-Life Option Act.

The example of the state of physician-assisted suicide in Canada, our country's neighbor, provides a sobering lesson on the abuses brought on by legalization. In one case, an individual who had been put on suicide watch was pushed to choose euthanasia, justified only by the fact that he was suffering from hearing loss. Alarm bells rung by his family and medical help, warning that his suffering was due to his depression and that he was being improperly pressured, were ignored. Such cases, according to disability groups, are not rare.¹ Military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and who self-reported suicidal thoughts were pressured to consider assisted suicide,² including, in one case, a paraplegic veteran who received an offer to choose suicide in response to her request for installation of a home wheelchair ramp.³ Individuals with histories of sexual abuse, anorexia, and other mental illnesses who reported suffering from depression were told that it would be hard to obtain proper treatment but that they could choose suicide.⁴ Patient "advocates" repeatedly bring up the topic without being prompted, and even encourage the patients to choose physician-assisted euthanasia.⁵ The frightening expansion of

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/covid-science-health-toronto-7c631558a457188d2bd2b5cfd360a867>

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/veterans-maid-rcmp-investigation-1.6663885>

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/christine-gauthier-assisted-death-macaulay-1.6671721>

⁴ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-maid-suicide-patient-vancouver/>

⁵ <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/canada-maid-medical-aid-in-dying-consent-doctors>

medically-assisted euthanasia has prompted concern from a variety of groups, including experts from the UN Human Rights Council.⁶

We are all-too-familiar with well-intentioned individuals who casually and condescendingly assume that the quality of life of individuals with disabilities is less than the quality of the lives of other, “normal” people, with assumptions that the pain and trials they may face are insurmountable, and with confident but incorrect proclamations by medical staff assuming that they can predict the future with total and complete accuracy. SB 443 opens the door to determining that some lives are worth more than others, and incentivizes abuse of the rights of the vulnerable. SB 443 undermines public trust in the medical and pharmacology professions by having them serve as agents of death. SB 443 incentivizes those who find vulnerable individuals burdensome to attempt to influence them to choose death. SB 443 also puts the responsibility for the initial judgement of the patient’s mental health state on the attending physician, despite the fact that such physicians possess no particular expertise in mental health.

For all these reasons and more, we respectfully ask that you firmly reject Senate Bill 443.

⁶ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?glId=26002>

