

**Testimony of Ilana Bar-Levav, MD**  
**Support for HB403 and SB443**  
**The End-of-Life Option Act**  
**February 2024**

My name is Ilana Bar-Levav. I am a physician, board certified in Internal Medicine and a practicing psychotherapist in Bethesda for over 30 years. I am a former president of the Montgomery County Medical Society and a strong supporter of the MD End of Life Option Act, HB403 and SB443 bill. My comments are rooted in both personal and professional experience.

My dearest uncle was an aeronautics engineer. In the summer of 2016, after 20 years of treatment and monitoring, his prostate cancer spread throughout his body. A resident of California, he told me he planned to exercise his rights under the new Death with Dignity Law that had passed weeks before. He initiated the procedure required to obtain a lethal dose of medication and asked for my support and presence at the end.

Hospice nurses visited my uncle semi-weekly to offer pain medication which he generally refused as he did not want to feel “drugged”, opting for physical pain from the bony metastases to the sense of powerlessness and frailty brought on by his inability to perform mentally or basic bodily functions.

Physicians regularly counsel their patients on life-or-death decisions regarding treatments and patients assess the risks and benefits in order to come to a reasoned decision. As a matter of course, these life and death decisions do not require psychiatric evaluation. When my uncle sought my support, I did not need to wear my psychotherapist hat to see that he knew clearly what lay ahead, was of sound mind and was fully capable of making decisions with respect to the limited number of days left of his life. My offer to be with him as he took his lethal dose helped him have the courage and strength to face death directly, as he remained to his last day, a man who loved life. We gathered his family, children and grandchildren and had a final day all together. At the time he designated, I put on the music

he requested, and sat with him while he drank the solution. He fell asleep quickly and died peacefully within a few hours surrounded by family.

Senators/Delegates, I urge you to vote in favor of HB 403/SB 443 to allow a death with dignity for those with a terminal illness and who desire it. While death is inevitable, terminal suffering is not.



November 10, 2016.

My uncle is in the center. This photo was taken within hours of his death. May his memory be a blessing.