



Committee: Health and Government Operations

Testimony on: HB 1328 – The End-of-Life Options Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)

Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council, Howard County, MD

Submitting: Rabbi Gordon Fuller and David Marker, members of the JCRC Executive Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Hearing Date: March 3, 2025

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council of the Howard County Jewish Federation represents a community of approximately 25,000 people in Jewish households. Jews are a peoplehood as well as a religion, and like all peoples are not monolithic. We believe that all voices are important in our community, non-Orthodox as well as Orthodox.

Judaism is clearly a religion that celebrates life, as we all know that we toast by drinking “l’chaim – to life!” What is lesser known is that we are able to break almost all of our commandments in order to save a life.

But we are also a religion that believes those lives should be meaningful. We are NOT a religion that believes in suffering, though we have been forced to suffer through many eras of our 3,500 year history.

Specifically, when it comes to death, we have numerous examples of when life is permissibly shortened in order to end suffering. The Talmud has multiple cases where it describes both praying for someone to live and praying for them to die. One example is when Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon is martyred by the Romans following the Bar Kochba revolt in the 2nd century. As he is being wrapped in a torah scroll and burned to death, he agrees with the merciful executioner to speed up the process so he will suffer less. Both are rewarded by God for their actions, including the executioner who assisted in his death.

A contemporary of Rabbi Teradyon, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, (called this because he was the head of the Sanhedrin, the equivalent of the supreme court) was suffering from dysentery. His students were praying fervently for his recovery, but as his maid saw how frequently he had to go to the privy and how severe his suffering was, she prayed for God to take his life. When that didn’t happen, she went up to the roof and dropped a jar off of it. When the jar crashed to the ground, the students were distracted by the noise and at that moment, Rabbi Yehuda died. The maid was neither criticized nor punished for what she did.

I worked as a Rabbi for Gilchrist Hospice and sat with many people who were suffering. Our tradition says that when a person's life is teetering between life and death, called a "go-SAYCE", we take no measures to revive them.

We believe that this bill recognizes the many different scenarios in which a human life is teetering in a precarious circumstance. Yet this bill has many benchmarks to ensure that it is not just a simple assisted suicide in any way. It is a humane way we can alleviate the suffering of our loved ones. And so, we support this bill from a deeply religious perspective and belief that God does not want unnecessary tragic suffering to be prolonged. We therefore urge each of you to support the End-of-Life Options Act.

Thank you.