

Written Statement by Stacey Katz in support of  
Maryland End-of-Life Option Act (HB 1328/SB926)

February 27, 2025

My name is Stacey Katz, I am a retired federal worker and have been a volunteer with Montgomery Hospice and have been trained by the International End-of-Life Doula Association to provide compassionate support to patients and their families at the end of life. I live in Takoma Park, MD and am very fortunate to have outstanding representatives in District 20.

Many thanks to Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, Chair of the House Health and Government Operations Committee and members of the committee for considering my written statement. I will not be giving oral testimony.

It has been a very long decade of MD legislators ignoring its residents who overwhelmingly support death with dignity. In the forty years I've been a MD resident, this is the first issue that has frustrated me to the point of lobbying for legislation. I don't know how many of you have sat at the bedside of people dying but it is very different for everyone. I am confident that all of you and your family members if asked, would say all they want is a peaceful death.

Unfortunately, with some diseases a peaceful death is not possible, even with exceptional hospice care. One case in point is the story of my favorite aunt who was diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer. She continued treatment long after she wanted, primarily to appease others. This is a type of coercion that no one talks about—being talked into toxic, agony-inducing treatment that no longer is effective at slowing or treating the disease or its symptoms. After she told her family she could no longer endure treatment and the doctor agreed it was no longer providing enough benefit, she began hospice care. Over several months, she was barely able to eat without throwing up, her existence was a struggle and her daughter had to leave her own young children to care for her mother. She had to watch her beloved mother slowly starve into a skeleton. The image of those last weeks with her mother traumatizes her to this day. Had medical aid in dying been available to my aunt, she would have seized the opportunity. She would have known when all of her extended family could be all together to see her through a peaceful, gentle end of life, without weeks and weeks of suffering. Those weeks cloud so many memories of my aunt and everyone, years later, still feels remorse for what she had to go through.

Medical Aid in Dying gives people some agency over their own bodies, when everything dear to them has been taken away. Just close your eyes and imagine that you need your children to take care of your toileting, you can no longer be physically active, eat any of your favorite foods, sustain reading or listening to a book, or watching a tv program. Imagine being unable to get comfortable all night, or having to endure pain that can not be managed by available drugs, or if it is, your GI tract is a mess from the drugs and you are so sedated that you are no longer engaging in life. And all the while, knowing this illness cannot improve or be cured. How long would you want your loved ones watch you suffer? How long would you want to watch your loved one in agony if all she wanted was to let go?

All I'm asking is that you leave this decision up to each MD resident as we reach the end of life and meet the requirements of HB1328. We know from the experience of ten states and DC over many years that the safeguards against coercion to use this option are very effective. In fact, they are so effective that people who want medical aid in dying find the hurdles can be too high. It is clear from polls (e.g., Gonzales Research and Media Services 2023) that the majority of MD residents support medical aid in dying across political, racial and geographic spectrums. Please, be that legislator who has compassion for Marylanders who are suffering

too long with a terminal illness and simply want the option of a peaceful death. Be that legislator who works across party lines on one of the few issues that matter to people regardless of their political orientation. This is a win win. Don't make people suffer any longer — the time to pass HB1328 is now. You will be so appreciated by MD voters.

Many thanks for your attention to this issue,

Stacey Katz  
Takoma Park, MD