



COMMISSION ON AGING

March 3, 2025

Judicial Proceedings Committee
Chair, Senator William C. Smith
Vice Chair, Senator Jeff Waldstreicher
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for SB0926- End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act)

Dear Chair Smith and Vice-Chair Waldstreicher:

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging in support of SB0926, End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass Act). The Act would authorize an individual, under proscribed circumstances, to request prescription medication so that they could die in peace and on their own terms. The Commission on Aging (CoA) was established by Montgomery County in 1974 pursuant to a requirement of the Federal Older Americans Act of 1965, that there be an Advisory Council to the Area Agency on Aging. In that role, the CoA serves as an advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of the County's older residents at the local, State, and National levels. Having options at the end of life is critically important to much of our constituency and we are proud to support SB0926.

Decisions about end-of-life care are essentially about the ability to exercise agency over our own bodily autonomy. As adults, we have the right to privacy, to protect ourselves, and to accept (or deny) medical intervention. The right to choose what type of medical treatment to pursue (or to reject) should not materially change just because we have been told we have 6 months or less to live.

Decisions about end-of-life care are also about compassion and empathy. Hospice and palliative care are essential programs for people with a variety of diagnoses and may alleviate pain and distress or support a desired quality of life for many, but not for everyone. No one wants to experience unneeded suffering or force another person to endure it. We should extend grace and kindness to people in these circumstances, rather than guilt them into continuing treatment that no longer works for them.

We acknowledge that the very idea of this bill is anathema to some people and cultures. It is for that reason we applaud the numerous safeguards in the legislation to ensure the request for aid in dying is genuine, voluntary, and undertaken with full consideration. For a person who is gravely ill and competent to make legal decisions for themselves, this legislation will provide an additional, much needed option in the care they choose to receive at the end of their life.

This bill is modeled after legislation in other parts of the United States and is comparable to the Oregon Death with Dignity Act. The Oregon legislation has been in effect for over 25 years without a single

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instance of abuse or coercion. Just as in Oregon, to be eligible under the proposed Maryland bill, one must be age 18 or older, terminally ill with a prognosis of 6 months or less, and mentally capable of making informed health care decisions.

The Montgomery County Commission on Aging strongly supports SB0926. We encourage the State of Maryland to join the ten other States and the District of Columbia to allow this end-of-life option for people who choose not to live with intolerable pain and suffering.

We respectfully request you return a favorable report on SB0926.

Sincerely,

Linda R. Bergofsky

Linda R. Bergofsky
Co-Chair
Montgomery County Commission on Aging