



29th November 2024

Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill Passes Second Reading in the House of Commons

Over the past few months, I have received hundreds of correspondences about the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill (the 'Bill'), which was debated in the House of Commons today (29 November 2024). I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to write to me on what is an important and emotive issue.

In preparation for the vote, I have been meeting with organisations and constituents to learn as much as possible about the feelings and arguments on all sides. I have heard many heartbreaking stories about people's family members or friends who have suffered terminal illnesses and painful deaths. We heard further such stories in the House of Commons today, and it is undeniable that many people feel very strongly that they would like to be able to choose the time of their passing. That was reflected in today's vote, passing by 330 to 275.

Personal freedom is a core value of mine, and like many people I hold it dear. Whether that's autonomy over who we love, who we live with, and what we do in life. Whilst respecting contrary views, I also believe that we should have autonomy over our bodies too, including when and how we die towards end-of-life. I would certainly like to have that choice available to me when the time comes. And I know that many people throughout our country would like to have that choice too.

But our individual rights to freedom and liberty are not – and should never be - unqualified. We should have no right in the pursuit of personal choice to put others in harm's way. Those sponsoring this Bill have told us it provides for the strongest safeguards in the world. I know that their views are sincere, but I have not been persuaded by them.

The definition of terminal illness in the Bill is extremely broad. A prognosis of six months to live is notoriously unreliable, and we heard in the House of Commons today from respected medical practitioners how medicine is not an exact science. The requirement to confirm a patient's capacity may be all too easy to satisfy. Medical practitioners need not know the person making the request, and approval from a judge presumes that our judicial system is investigatory, which it is not. The judicial safeguard, as drafted, is an illusion. And given our severely over-stretched health, social care, and judicial systems, I am worried that if this Bill passes unamended, we might in future witness systemic bias, shortcuts, wrongful deaths, and endless court cases resulting in expansion of scope without express authorisation from Parliament.

The debate today lasted just five hours, many questions remain unanswered, and I have serious doubts that the Bill adequately protects the vulnerable from coercion. And knowing that it is very rare for Private Members Bills to be amended in committee except with the consent of the sponsor – who believes that the current safeguards are world-leading - I could not vote for this Bill in the mere hope that such substantial issues would be properly ironed out during the next stage.

Detailed and effective scrutiny is vital to a fully safeguarded law. This Bill is being rushed, and the consequences of getting it wrong are simply not worth contemplating. And that is why I voted Against the Bill today.

It is fundamental in the pursuit of freedom and choice that we leave absolutely no stone unturned to protect the vulnerable and equality under the law. And that will remain my guiding principle as this Bill now makes progress through the House of Commons.

Thank you so much again for taking the time to share your own thoughts with me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blake', with a horizontal line underneath.

Blake Stephenson MP
MP for Mid Bedfordshire