



25 November 2024

To my constituents,

Thank you so much for taking the time to write to me about the upcoming vote on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill. I have received a very large number of emails, letters and postcards about this issue from constituents, and I have been really touched by how many people have told me about their own personal experience of loved ones facing really hard choices at the end of their lives.

I will be voting to progress the Bill at the second reading on 29 November. The issue is something that I have thought about deeply and worked on for many years, supporting a number of cases brought by people facing terminal illness and incurable suffering in my capacity as a Patron of Humanists UK, and I have met with the Hospice movement, Disabled people and others who have practical questions about any change in the law.

Their views – and those of the constituents who have got in touch with different views, including support for the Bill and concerns – will be something I and others in Parliament will be seeking to address as the debate continues on this issue.

I want to explain a little more about my reasons for supporting the Bill, and for wanting to see a change in the law on assisted dying.

Polling of public opinion shows a large majority of people want the option to choose assisted dying if they are diagnosed with an incurable condition that would make their final months or weeks of life unbearably painful or distressing. We know that hundreds of people each year who are able to will take this decision into their own hands either by travelling abroad or taking their own lives, and that potentially they will do this sooner than they would if a legal and supportive option were available here. The law as it stands too often forces people to seek unregulated, distressing and unsafe alternatives, and I don't think this is fair or right.

In addition, the current legal situation makes it a prosecutable offence for anyone to advise or assist someone in this horrible situation. This means people who are terminally ill and suffering must keep secret their plans, make these plans completely alone, and cannot even discuss the action they wish to take with their loved ones or doctors. Some of the testimony I have seen from family members and partners who have faced this situation has been genuinely heartbreaking and I want to make sure the new law helps them too.

Several people have raised concerns about the possibility of coercion with me, but the current legal situation means that, where someone with terminal illness has died unexpectedly, the only way to uncover cases of coercion is through investigation after someone has died, when there may be very little evidence due to the need for secrecy built into the law.



Therefore, another reason I support the new law Kim Leadbeater MP has proposed is that this provides a clear way for someone who wishes to choose assisted dying to state their wishes, and for their situation to be examined for any evidence of coercion at several points in the process, while suspicious cases that have not gone through the legal process can be more clearly and fairly investigated too.

It is also important to me that the proposed assisted dying law would only apply to mentally competent adults, and the proposals ensure that younger people and disabled people without a terminal diagnosis would not be eligible. I do not believe this would be changed by Parliament in future, reflecting the final nature of such legislation in the majority of places where it has been introduced.

It is also the case that, in jurisdictions which have changed the law in the way being proposed, palliative care and other end-of-life options have improved at the same time. I believe this is because more attention is paid to these neglected services, and a more open conversation takes place about what practical problems people face at the end of their lives – something we are not generally comfortable talking about now in this country.

Finally, I also support the Bill for reasons of human rights. I do not believe that anyone should be forced to endure terrible suffering that could be prevented, and I also believe in arguing for increases in resources across society to help everyone to have the freedom to choose what their lives and deaths look like.

Importantly, the coming vote, if passed, will just be the start of the process, with the legislation and its complex and sensitive issues still to be considered very carefully and in detail by the Commons and the Lords before it finally becomes law. It is crucial that Parliament dedicates the necessary time and attention to hearing from a wide range of voices during the next stages too.

Thank you again for writing to me about such an important and personal issue. While this will be an unwhipped vote of conscience by every MP, it has been so valuable to hear from so many people about their views and I want to assure you that I have listened and considered every point and concern people have put to me.

My very best wishes,

Siân Berry MP  
Green Party, Brighton Pavilion