



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

### **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill**

Thank you to those who have written to me to share their views on assisted dying and the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill.

This is, without a doubt, the vote I have found the most difficult during my five years in Parliament. I am conscious that it is a decision that could have condemned some of my own constituents to unimaginable pain and suffering.

I instinctively believe my role as a parliamentarian is to provide people with the freedom and agency they seek in life, enabling choice while carefully considering the right safeguards.

However, the Bill has a number of flaws that I could not vote for today as it will not provide adequate protections for the vulnerable, disabled, or elderly.

Allowing a proxy who has never met the patient to sign their declaration of intent, allowing medical practitioners to raise the option of assisted dying whether or not the patient has shown any appetite for it, placing the burden of proof of coercion on the highly stretched family courts profession or medical practitioners, having no requirement to inform any family members when someone has made a declaration of intent – all of these sections of the Bill leave the balance of risk too high.

I also disagree with the Bill's current insistence that assisted dying services would come into force in just two years' time, whether or not the preparations had been judged competent and proper. This may force resources away from other parts of our stretched healthcare system, such as palliative care, which would impact other patients who are in pain and seeking dignity at the end of their lives.

I do not have confidence that the '6 months to live' condition would withstand discrimination cases brought to either our courts or that of the ECHR, which may also mean a marked and unexpected increase in resources for assisted dying services is forced on the healthcare system which, again, would require redistribution from other areas.

I believe that, for many, the knowledge that they could have a medically assisted death would provide comfort and reassurance that they would have dignity and choice in the manner of their death. I would personally want to know I had that choice myself, and I would want it for the people I have seen die a long, drawn-out, and painful death. However, when I consider how this Bill would allow assisted dying services to operate from the perspective of those who are alone, deeply distressed, or experiencing financial or familial difficulty, I cannot support it as it stands.

Thank you for sharing your views with me; the personal stories of constituents have been deeply moving. I know there will be those of you who will feel disappointed in my decision today.

Yours sincerely,

*The Rt. Hon. Claire Coutinho MP*  
**Member of Parliament for East Surrey**