

Seriously Ill Advocates for MD End-of-Life Option Act Express Concerns that Reported Bill Amendments May Endanger Passing Law This Year

Concerned Amendments May Make It More Difficult, if Not Impossible, for Terminally Ill Marylanders to Access Law

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Seriously ill advocates for the End-of-Life Option Act ([SB311/HB399](#)) urged senators Thursday not to add reported [amendments](#) to the bill's [multiple eligibility criteria and safeguards](#) that may make it more difficult, if not impossible, for terminally ill adults to access the law if it passes. The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee is scheduled to vote on the legislation on Friday.

"If excessive amendments are added to the legislation's numerous eligibility criteria and safeguards, it may make it more difficult, if not impossible, to access this law," said Chevy Chase resident and former psychotherapist Marcy Gray Rubin, who has been receiving medical treatment for metastatic stage IV breast cancer for six years. "It is a risk terminally ill Marylanders cannot afford. I am pleading with our senators to please pass the End of Life Option Act, without excessive amendments, so that I may have this final gift: To die peacefully in my own home, surrounded by the love of my dearest family and friends."



Bill sponsor Sen. William C. Smith, Compassion & Choices CEO Kim Callinan and supporters attending the March 14 press conference for the Maryland End-of-Life Option Act.

A study by [Kaiser Permanente Southern California](#) showed that one-third of the terminally ill adults with six months or less to live who requested medical aid in dying under California's End of Life Option Act died before they were able to complete the process and obtain a prescription. The California law does not contain any of the possible amendments in Maryland reported by [The Maryland Daily Record](#) last Friday.

"This bill is loaded with protections for patients," said Rockville Carol Preston, who has received medical treatment for the blood cancer chronic lymphocytic leukemia twice and a year ago was blindsided by a potentially deadly soft tissue sarcoma. "I urge senators to please vote for the bill without adding excessive amendments that will endanger passing this law this year [and] would turn the bill into a phantom legal option. Allow terminally ill patients the dignity to have a final say in their end-of-life care options."

Bill supporters also are concerned that excessive amendments may endanger passing the same bill in both houses by the [end of the legislative session on April 8](#). [The House of Delegates passed the End-of-Life Option Act last Thursday](#), so if the Senate passes an amended bill, the House would have to pass the Senate bill too or the two legislative bodies would have to agree on a compromise bill and pass it in both bodies.

"It's already too difficult for eligible patients to access the law in neighboring Washington, D.C. and California," said Kim Callinan, CEO of Compassion & Choices and a 22-year resident of Maryland. "More delays and amendments are not necessary. What IS necessary is the passage of this compassionate end-of-life care option right now."

Neighboring Washington, D.C. and seven states have authorized medical aid in dying: California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Montana, Oregon, Vermont and Washington. Collectively, these jurisdictions have more than 40 combined years of experience successfully implementing this medical practice.

"I urge Maryland lawmakers not to put additional obstacles in the form of excessive amendments in the path of those making this hardest and most personal of decisions," said Stella Dawson Klein, whose wife, Mary Dawson Klein, died peacefully last August, thanks to the D.C. Death with Dignity Act. The D.C. law does not contain the reported amendments in the Maryland End-of-Life Option Act, yet Mary still had great difficulty accessing the D.C. law. "Do not extend the stress and uncertainty that we face. It robs you of precious time. Allow each person to confront death with their own strength and dignity."

There are 69 co-sponsors of the End-of-Life Option Act, more than one-third of the state's 188 lawmakers. Other supporters include the [ACLU](#), [Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ](#), [Compassion & Choices Maryland](#), [League of Women Voters of Maryland](#), [Libertarian Party of Maryland](#), [Maryland Congressmen Elijah Cummings](#) and [Anthony Brown](#), [Marylanders for End-of-Life Options](#), [Suburban Maryland Psychiatric Society](#), [Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland](#), [United Seniors of Maryland](#), and [WISE \(Women Indivisible Strong Effective\)](#).

"Physicians regularly counsel their patients on life or death decisions regarding treatments and patients assess the risks and benefits in order to come to a reasoned decision," said [Dr. Ilana Bar Levay](#), MD, a board-certified physician in Internal Medicine and practicing psychotherapist in Bethesda, who witnessed her uncle use the California End of Life Option Act. "There is a severe shortage of mental health professionals in Maryland, so [a amendment] requiring a psychiatric evaluation of every patient who requests medical aid in dying would mean many patients would die before they could get a prescription [and] discriminate against patients who live in rural counties, where the shortage...is most acute."

A [Public Policy Polling](#) last month showed Marylanders support medical aid in dying by a 3-1 margin (66% to 20%), including majority support from African Americans (59%) and every other demographic group (Independents: 73%, Democrats: 70%, Republicans: 53%, Whites: 69%, Catholics: 65%, Protestants: 62%, Jews: 67%, and Muslims: 52%). The [Maryland State Medical Society](#) adopted a neutral stance on the bill after a 2016 survey showed [most of its members supported it](#).



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