

# SARAH SACKMAN MP



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Dear Finchley and Golders Green Resident,

I am writing to you as your local MP to let you know that I will be voting in favour of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November. I wanted to share my reasons why.

I would like to begin by thanking the many hundreds of residents across Finchley and Golders Green who have taken the time to write to me with sincerity and thoughtfulness about their views on this most sensitive of subjects. Over the past weeks and months, I have met with leaders of our local hospice, palliative care doctors, people who are themselves terminally ill, leaders of faith communities and disability rights advocates. I have attended events, both in Parliament and locally, and studied the arguments on the draft Bill with care.

I know that people's attitudes towards assisted dying are diverse, complex and heartfelt. People on all sides of the debate have impressed me with their compassion and the preciousness which they attach to every individual life.

My central reason for supporting the Bill is a respect for individual autonomy. The right to exercise free will and control over our bodies is something which is core to what makes us human. I am struck that we enjoy control over so many aspects of our lives and yet the process of death – the single experience which will come to us all – is one over which we have no control.

This Bill avows a simple proposition – the extension of a right to die at a time of their choosing for those who have capacity and who are terminally ill. The Bill creates a right which is exercisable by those who choose it for themselves, whilst leaving those who wish to die unassisted free to do so.

As its title indicates, the Bill is about allowing terminally ill people to die with greater dignity and control. Its purpose is to provide a right which would prevent unnecessary suffering. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Romain, the Bill is about shortening death – not shortening life.

I believe the Bill is compassionate and addresses the shortcomings of the current legal position; a status quo which is failing people. Under the current law, hundreds of terminally ill people take their lives every year without assistance – causing needless and profound distress to both themselves and those who care for them.

Palliative care is vital and will always play a crucial role. It deserves proper resource. However, as I've learned from palliative specialists themselves, there will inevitably be cases in which individuals who are receiving the best care available will still suffer intolerable levels of pain and suffering. Even the most sophisticated of drugs and brilliant medical technology cannot anaesthetise the indignity that death often brings.

It is not just the medical position but the current legal position which is untenable. It is telling that three recent Directors of Public Prosecutions consider the current law to be unfit for purpose. It cannot be right that in many cases, an act of compassion, often for a lifelong partner, is met with the threat of prosecution



for months and years after. These are not criminal or immoral acts and yet that is how the current law describes them.

People's deaths are accelerated every day – whether through the withdrawal of treatment, the administering of pain relief with “double effect”, or in the worst of circumstances, people taking their own lives. This happens in a largely unregulated fashion. In many cases, this provides neither dignity nor control for terminally ill people, nor does it protect individuals from coercion. I believe that this Bill can provide those things and would bring assisted dying for the terminally ill into the light, decriminalising it and providing individuals with greater safeguards.

The draft Bill is clear, precise and well-drafted. If the Bill passes at Second Reading, I will be monitoring its progress at the Committee stage when proposals around resourcing and implementation will be scrutinised. The principle underpinning it – the right of the terminally ill to choose the manner of their death – is one which I support.

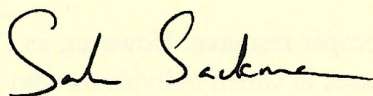
I have listened carefully to the concerns that exist about the risk that some people may be coerced – either directly, perhaps by family members with malign intentions, or indirectly by feelings that they have become a burden on their family and wider society – but I consider that the Bill guards against them. Care has been taken to build in what will be the most robust safeguards in any assisted dying legislation for the terminally ill anywhere in the world. The oversight provided by two independent doctors and a High Court Judge is strong.

The Bill draws on the evidence of over 20 other jurisdictions with similar laws and in particular Victoria, Australia and Oregon, USA, which have introduced a similar right for the terminally ill. Those examples offer the rebuttal to those who say the Bill will lead to a ‘slippery slope’. In those systems, the laws have not significantly changed since their inception, they have not been expanded to loosen the eligibility criteria, coercion is vanishingly rare, and the availability of the right operates well alongside a system of palliative care.

Finally, this Bill, if passed, need not undermine the sanctity of life nor the moral value of the terminally ill. For me it does the opposite. By extending to people the right to determine the time of their death, as a society, we will have demonstrated our compassion. The granting of the right to choose the process by which we die is a reminder of our humanity. The right to choose is an expression of the liberty which is, in essence, what makes life so precious.

For those reasons I will vote in favour of the Bill on Friday.

With best wishes,



**Sarah Sackman KC MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Finchley and Golders Green**