



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dear Constituent,

11th September 2015

The House of Commons voted against giving the Assisted Dying Bill a second reading by 330 to 118 votes, a majority of 212 for MPs who opposed assisted dying.

Having attended today's debate in Parliament and listened to speeches from all sides of the argument, I am writing to update you on my decision to vote against the Assisted Dying Bill, a Private Member's Bill which was presented today by Rob Marris MP. The text of the Bill can be found here: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/assisteddyingno2.html>.

Assisting or encouraging suicide is a criminal offence under Section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961 for which the maximum penalty is 14 years' imprisonment. I am aware that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has published guidelines primarily concerned with advising the Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors about the factors which they need to consider when deciding whether it is in the public interest to prosecute a person for assisting or encouraging another to commit suicide.

I believe the application of the law should be flexible enough to distinguish the facts and the circumstances of one case from another. To this end, the DPP's policy offers important and sensitive guidance.

I fully accept that suicide, assisting or encouraging suicide, assisted dying and euthanasia are all subjects on which it is entirely possible for people to hold widely different but defensible opinions. This is why the substance of the law in this area is not a matter of party politics but of conscience.

Everyone would agree that terminally ill patients should receive the highest quality palliative support and end-of-life care, and that they and their families should be certain that their end-of-life care will meet all of their needs. With that in mind I welcome the Department of Health's End of Life Care Strategy which is intended to improve access to good quality palliative care and encourage the Government further to develop specialist palliative care and hospice provision.

I accept that there are imperfections and problems with the current law, but I think that these can be dealt with sensitively and sensibly without having a new law that actually brings in euthanasia. Although the DPP's policy makes clear that assisting a person to die is still illegal, I am worried that by not prosecuting those assisting in the suicide of others we will encourage demands for legalising

Member of Parliament for Havant

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assisted dying and euthanasia. The lives of the terminally ill and the frail are of equal value to anyone else's. They deserve equal protection under the criminal law.

Having read the text of Mr Marris' Bill, I was concerned that there were not enough safeguards in place to protect the most vulnerable. I could not vote for something that could foster an atmosphere where people, especially older people, felt a "burden" to their families. This could have set a dangerous precedent, whereby those deemed terminally ill would effectively be termed as being of little or no worth or value in our society. The end of any life is traumatic and difficult for relatives. There are, however, schemes in place for palliative care, which I believe offers patients more dignity rather than simply ending their lives. I was also concerned that there were minimal checks for those who might be suffering from depression.

In addition to attending the debate in Parliament today, I have read and listened to the views of constituents who have contacted me, reviewed the experience of other countries in tackling this issue, and considered the advice of organisations that represent the medical professions, older people, people with disabilities and faith communities.

I was also troubled by the notion that once this law was enacted, the circumstances where it might be used could slowly increase to encompass a much wider group of people than was originally intended, and the fact that the Bill would have changed the traditional relationship between patients and doctors by formally putting doctors into a position where their aim is not to heal but to help kill a patient.

Having considered this issue at length, and the wording of the Bill itself, I decided to cast my vote to protect the rights of vulnerable patients. I know that that in so doing I will be disappointing some of my constituents but ultimately I have done what I think is right in the circumstances.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

ALAN MAK MP