




Speech By
James Martin

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (6.15 pm): I have heard many people say that the vote members cast in this place will be one of the most significant votes of their parliamentary career, and I agree. I understand that this is a very emotional issue for our community, especially for those who have lost a loved one to a terminal illness. I have been moved by the stories shared by members of this place about the loved ones they have lost. After thoughtful consideration, I have made the decision to support this bill.

The end of life invokes some of humanity's deepest questions. These questions have formed the basis of religious and moral debates for thousands of years. I firmly believe that these deeply personal and spiritual matters should be resolved by individuals in the examination of their own conscience. To me, it is about giving individuals faced with certain death a choice—an option—that they can discuss with a health professional, a choice to avoid unnecessary pain and suffering. It is not a choice about life and death but a choice about what kind of death you will have, or a choice to fight to the end no matter what.

Importantly, I respect the views of those opposed to euthanasia who would never choose it for themselves. I would also say that I similarly respect the views of those who believe differently, which includes an equally legitimate choice that a terminally ill patient should be able to make.

An individual's struggle with terminal illness is a journey. It can start with a feeling that something is not quite right with your health and an initial trip to the doctor, then proceeding through diagnosis, treatment, palliative care and, in the end, death. Throughout that journey the person will have many different choices to make—how to tell their family, how to spend their last months or years, their treatment options. As the illness progresses, the choices inevitably narrow.

My views regarding this legislation have been profoundly influenced by my friend and former member for Stretton, Duncan Pegg, and his journey with cancer. Duncan faced the end of his life with courage and dignity. I was present at the beginning of Duncan's journey, when he received his cancer diagnosis. I will never forget the look on the doctor's face or the look on Duncan's face. I will never forget how I felt. Family and friends who have been in this situation will know well the initial feelings of shock that come with this kind of news. For myself, it was shock followed by denial. It is this experience which has informed my view that these laws are just as necessary for terminally ill patients at the beginning of their journey as at the end.

After hearing that life-changing news, a patient is then faced with their first choice: how to live with terminal cancer or another illness. This choice is very personal and different for each person. For some it means quitting work to spend time with family and friends. For others it means ticking things off a bucket list. For some, like Duncan, it means focusing on work. Being the member for Stretton and serving his community was part of Duncan's identity. Earlier this year Duncan was faced with the news that his cancer had become resistant to treatment. As the hardworking and loyal servant of parliament and his local constituents, he chose to make that public announcement in this place and to handwrite a

personal note to the people of Stretton. His final speech in this place was one of the most powerful and dignified speeches I have ever heard. He stated clearly what he knew: that people with a terminal illness do not want to die; they fight to live every day. Duncan fought to live. He fought hard. He stated clearly that he would not tell people how to vote as it was a matter of conscience, but he was clear. He said—

People with terminal illnesses want to have an option. ... I encourage every MP in this place to make sure they speak to, and listen to, people with terminal illnesses and their families. I think if you do that you will get a clear consensus view.

As those in this chamber know, Duncan's journey ended on 10 June.

What this legislation says is that the individual should retain that one last choice at the very end but, importantly, it gives people at the beginning of their journey some comfort that they will have some control over how they die.

After many discussions I have had with constituents, there was a notable concern that introducing assisted dying legislation might have a dangerous effect on others, especially people in a similar position who do not want to end their life. Might they feel pressure to do so? To address this concern, there are safeguards that include strict eligibility requirements and processes that must be followed. This means that the eligible person must have decision-making capacity and be acting voluntarily, without coercion. The proposed law sets out strict processes for how voluntary assisted dying can be accessed. It includes many safeguards to ensure only eligible people access the scheme and to protect the vulnerable from coercion, abuse and exploitation. A key point is that a person may choose not to proceed at any stage in the process.

More than a choice, this bill also gives comfort to the terminally ill that they have an option as they approach the end. The Victorian experience highlights this point. Over 30 per cent of patients who accessed life-ending medication did not go ahead. The option was there to ease their mind and ready if chosen. This experience indicates that many people want to have the emotional safety net of knowing they can resort to getting help to die if their situation makes life intolerable but find that they never reach that stage. I believe that the legislation effectively balances these important points.

For my final comments I would speak directly to the Queensland people. While we debate this legislation in parliament, we must remember that there will be Queenslanders across the state who have today learned from their doctor or physician that they are facing a terminal diagnosis. Let us put ourselves in their shoes. They are now contemplating how to return home and break the news to their families—their parents, their partners or their children—their friends and other people in their life. At the same time, they are wondering how long they will have left and what they should do with their time remaining. Maybe they cannot at this stage think clearly about those matters.

Perhaps tonight those people will turn on the news and see politicians are debating euthanasia. For those individuals I want to say to them that I am conscious of the pain and uncertainty you are going through, as are many members in this place. Many of us have had loved ones who have been on the same journey. When I vote for this bill, I am thinking of you. I am also thinking of Duncan. I hope you beat this, but I also want you to have the choice if things do not improve—the choice of how to conclude your journey here on this planet and the choice of how you move beyond this life. I want you to have an option to avoid suffering. That is there for you, if you so choose. I hope there is some comfort in that.