




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2021

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (6.25 pm): I rise in this House to place on the record my deep support for voluntary assisted dying. It will be the most important bill, I think, of my time in this place. Death and how we pass is deeply personal for each of us, and I think we have heard that already today. I have reflected over quite some time now the passing of my own dad and the passing of my grandma and thinking about terminal illness when my partner Shayne was diagnosed with cancer last year. I believe strongly that people who are terminally ill and who are in unbearable pain and suffering deserve the right to choose their own end-of-life journey and to pass with care, compassion and dignity. Put very simply, this bill for me is about giving all Queenslanders the freedom of choice. We are indeed blessed if we and those we love never have to make this very personal choice about how we pass, but knowing that that choice exists is something that brings me comfort and the many in this chamber who have expressed that same feeling.

It is in my heart of hearts the most compassionate and caring choice to make available to those with a terminal illness. Every Queenslander should have this choice and I certainly do not believe that it is for me or anyone else in this place to deny dignity in death. I thank, as other speakers have done today, the many community members who have contacted me to share their views and their often deeply personal experience of their own loved one's passing from terminal illness. I respect the divergent views on this debate and I thank everybody who has contacted me on both sides of this debate. I wanted to share a few of these stories because I think it is really important to put these lived experiences that speak to the heart of this bill on the record.

The first is my good friend Tam, who is in the gallery tonight. This is Tam's mum's story. I know this legislation, Tam, is too late for your mum, but I know how much you loved her and I know that this is really important legislation for you and your family. Cinta Waaka Coats was a strong, fierce, big-hearted and cheeky force of nature—very much mother like daughter, I think. Cinta was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer after becoming paralysed down her left side while living overseas. She fell down and she never got back up again and she was only 61. It was terrifying and extremely frustrating for her to suddenly be confined to a bed and a chair and it was humiliating to no longer be independent, to no longer be able to do the basics. The cancer stripped away everything, but she kept fighting. I reflect on our good friend Duncan Pegg's last speech in this place—that is, those who are terminally ill are fighting to live every day for as long as they possibly can.

Cinta fought to get well enough to come home, knowing all of the risks involved. With so much beyond her control, she wanted to determine her own destiny. Cinta did not deserve to go the way she did in the end, with unnecessary suffering, dehydration, battling to breathe and crying through the morphine. She is now free, but she should have had that right to choose. She should have had the choice to be able to die with dignity. She might not have decided to use it, but she would have had comfort in knowing that she had that choice. Cinta was a brave Maori warrior and she will always be deeply loved by Tam and her family.

My very good friend Therese McLean would have also been in the gallery tonight if she could have been. I know she is watching this from her bed at the moment. Therese and your gang of four, this bill is for you. Therese, long before being diagnosed with cancer, spent many, many years at the forefront of advocating for voluntary assisted dying. She has spent her lifetime helping others. She has the biggest heart.

In January 2021, not long after she retired, she was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer in both breasts, metastases of the sternum and the lymphatic system—aggressive terminal cancer. She commenced extraordinarily heavy-duty chemotherapy and was receiving megablasts every three weeks, being admitted to hospital as an inpatient for two to three days after each of those treatments. She has had to stop those treatments. She has only had 10 out of the 20 because of the impact it was having on her heart. She is currently having intense radiation. Therese deserves this choice. She possibly will not have the comfort of knowing that she can access this legislation. All Queenslanders deserve this choice. I know that Therese will gain great comfort in seeing this legislation passed after her battle in advocating for it.

Heather is a constituent of mine in Redland Bay. Last week she wrote to me—

... I am writing to you to show my support for the proposed Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill.

Last year, my husband passed away after a 2 year battle with cancer. As a Paramedic with 30 years experience he was a great supporter of the choice to have assistance for a comfortable, pain free death.

However, when he came to the end of his life he did not have this option. He fought hard to stay alive. The chemotherapy was brutal but given the choice he continued, determined to stay alive as long as he could.

Despite the very best of palliative care, he suffered with overwhelming nausea and pain. His last words to me were not of love, but the word 'Pain'.

It was heartbreaking for myself, my sons, and my family.

I was a Registered Nurse for 33 years and I am fully aware of the arguments for and against Voluntary Assisted Dying, but I think the emphasis should be on 'Choice'.

Every person should have the right to self determination, especially those who suffer severe pain, have degenerative conditions, or have a terminal prognosis. If a person comes to a point in their lives where they would rather die than continue to experience their pain or to progress with their degenerative condition, it should be their decision and theirs alone to make.

I hope you bring yourself to vote in favour of the Bill, so all of us may have this choice.

In conclusion, this bill has been through one of the most rigorous processes of any bill I have seen. It has been reviewed by the Queensland Law Reform Commission. The QLRC put an enormous amount of time and effort into that review process to ensure that we have all of the right safeguards in place. We have had the benefit of being able to evaluate this legislation in other jurisdictions.

It is a privilege to have a conscience vote in this legislation that is underpinned by mercy and compassion. Overwhelmingly there is strong support in my community and that certainly adds to where my conscience sits. That is why I am standing here today supporting this bill. I will put it simply: this legislation is about giving choice, peace, compassion, comfort and dignity. I commend this bill to the House.