




Speech By
Hon. Leanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (3.06 pm): I rise to contribute to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. I want to start by acknowledging the huge amount of work and personal sacrifice made by the members of the health committee from all sides of politics, in particular the member for Thuringowa who has remain dignified, compassionate and dedicated in his role as chairperson. I know that the kinds of stories that we have been hearing just in this last 24 hours have been multiplied by hundreds for those committee members and I am sure that that has taken a toll personally. I want to acknowledge all of that and acknowledge the chairperson, the member for Thuringowa, for all of his work. I also acknowledge the leadership of the Premier and the Deputy Premier.

At this point in the debate it is important to reflect on the contributions of so many in this House. The courage it takes to share very personal stories of loved ones and the respect it takes to share the stories of others should be recognised. It is the lived experiences of my family and friends and the lived experiences of people from across my electorate who have shared their stories so freely with me that have collectively informed my decision to support this legislation. I know that there will remain differences of opinion, but I am so proud of the respectful way that we have all discussed this very personal and very confronting issue.

I come from what some would regard a very large family. My dad was one of 15, I have more than 40 first cousins and an extended family that numbers in the hundreds. My family knows death very well and we know it in all its forms—slow and painful death; short, sharp and unexpected death; murder; suicide. Our lived experience is vast and culturally it is a lived experience that is shared. When one hurts, we all hurt. When one is in pain, we all feel that pain. When I was a child I thought my dad was the strongest man on earth. He had muscles on his muscles. He worked incredibly hard six days a week driving bulldozers and other heavy machinery in quarries and mines around South-East Queensland for over 40 years.

He had excitedly planned to retire on his 65th birthday. That is all he talked about. In his eyes a man, a Quandamooka man who was not even counted as a citizen of this country even though his family had lived here for thousands of generations, reaching retirement age was a massive achievement, something that he wanted to boast about to everybody who would listen to him. Exactly two weeks before his birthday my dad was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer. It was unfair. It was a destruction of his dream and all that he had worked for. He had worked so hard for more than 40 years thinking that one day he would retire and then that day would be the day where he could relax and enjoy his life with his family.

He fought every day for the next 10 months to stay with us, but it steadily took him away. He became weaker and weaker as he wasted away right in front of us. I do not think I will ever be able to erase that image of the blank stare he had in those last days. It was a look of resignation and a mask of sadness I had never seen him wear so publicly before. Our whole family felt the pain of losing him. We had the ability to care for him at home. He was not in excruciating pain. My mum was with him in

those very last moments. That is not the experience of so many others in my family and from across the community that I represent where hospitalisation is unavoidable and choice is dramatically diminished. I cannot even imagine how my father would have coped if he did not have the choice of being at home when he passed. He regularly begged to not go to hospital, even when he probably should have. He did not want to die there. He did not want to spend his last weeks and days away from his family and in a place that was not of him.

I have spoken to my mum and other family members many times since Dad's passing. We have pondered how Dad could have coped if extreme intolerable pain was part of his journey. We thank God every day that he did not have to endure that kind of physical pain, but reflect on his constant laboured breathing and the weak state that he was in towards the end—such a difference from my childhood images. I do not know if he would have pursued voluntary assisted dying if the pain was intolerable, although I have a feeling he would have, but I know 100 per cent that he would have wanted the choice. This legislation provides choice.

This bill seeks to provide eligible people who are suffering and dying with the choice of requesting medical assistance to end their lives. Importantly, the bill will ensure that the process is accessed only by persons who are assessed to be eligible; protect vulnerable persons from coercion and exploitation; provide legal protection for health practitioners whether they choose to participate or not; and establish a Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board and other mechanisms to ensure compliance with the act. It is these safeguards and protections that make this a responsible bill. Consistent with the Queensland Law Reform Commission's recommendations, the bill provides that to be eligible to access voluntary assisted dying the person must be diagnosed with a disease, illness or medical condition that is advanced, progressive and will cause death within 12 months and is causing suffering that the person considers to be intolerable. The person must also have decision-making capacity in relation to voluntary assisted dying and be acting voluntarily and without coercion. They must be at least 18 years of age and meet Australian citizen and Queensland residency requirements; however, I note that residency exemptions may apply where the person has a substantial connection to Queensland and there are compassionate grounds for granting an exemption.

With the inclusion of these provisions, the bill balances the need to protect vulnerable people with the rights of a person who meets the eligibility criteria to access a lawful end-of-life option should they choose to do so. Ultimately this bill speaks to values and our ability to see the world through the experiences of others. The stories of so many and their courage to share them is at the heart of this legislation. The valuing of those brave voices forms the compelling reason to see the legislation passed. I reflect on my family and my lived experiences. I reflect on my culture as an Aboriginal woman and my relationship to death and the spirit world. I reflect on my family's contributions in conversations that I have had with them and the cultural practices that we undertake every day. I reflect on the member for Cook's contribution as a Torres Strait Islander woman. These are hard conversations. These are hard decisions for families and for individuals, but choice is at the heart of this and that is why I support this bill. I commend the bill to the House.