




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR COOMERA

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (5.40 pm): The road to this week when we debate the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 has taken an emotional toll on all of us and many, many others in our communities, but that toll pales into insignificance when we consider the pain, suffering and emotional toll on those whom this bill is intended to assist. As well, it pales into insignificance when we think of the emotional toll that impacts those close family and friends who are there to support and comfort them.

Today I spoke to a group of legal studies students from Livingstone Christian College. A great deal of what I spoke about related to this bill and the journey to where we are as a House today. I outlined what a member of parliament does. I said that we are the voice of our community in this place. Yes, we are their voice and we must listen to them, but we are also one of them with our own views on the issues we face in this process.

Recently I spoke with a student one on one from one of my other schools who approached me with a specific question about this bill. She seemed to think at the time that the issues were quite straightforward and that it was a straightforward decision. We spoke for some time, and I hope that I was able to properly explain, using examples at times, that it is not that simple, that there is a lot to consider including community, family and specific details, and I will try to share a little of what I shared with her.

The first person I talked about was my mum. My mum suffered from mesothelioma. Mum fought for 18 months or more, struggling for breath every day. When we spoke to her on the telephone we could speak for 30 seconds, if we were lucky a minute, and she just had to go. She could not talk; she could not breathe. My dad was absolutely amazing as her sole carer, and they shared those times together. He remembered those times together as precious, as did we. Then one night when all of the family were there she said to me, 'I think I'll die tonight' and thankfully she did. Thankfully, the pain was gone. At no time during that period did my mum ever wish she had the option of being taken early.

Fifteen years later my dad suffered from asbestosis from the same source as my mum: she washed the clothes; Dad wore the clothes. The end came on quickly for Dad, just a matter of days. What I mean by that is that he did not suffer the way Mum suffered for an extended period of time, although there was some suffering there. Then out of the blue he was admitted to hospital. I got a phone call, I was in Darwin at the time, and we flew back straightaway. He was gone in a matter of a few days, but again Dad fought to the bitter end. He fought every minute in bed. When we all knew he was going, he continued to fight.

Then there was my friend of 40 years who, five years or so before he died, suffered a brain tumour. Against the odds, his initial fight to live bought him some quality time with his family. He went into hospital and had operation after operation. Each time the question before he went in was, 'Do we resuscitate if things go badly?' Each time the answer was yes. He was of that mind. In the end, his horrendous pain just to be touched was a contrast. Whilst he was there, whilst he was able to

comprehend, whilst he still saw value in his life with his family and the community, he wanted to keep going. In the end though just to touch him, to kiss him on the forehead—I will never forget him squealing in pain. He was an amazing and intelligent man, and he knew he was not much longer for this world. One of his regrets was that he would die and all of his knowledge would be lost. Those who knew him knew what he meant. He gave so much in his later years to a men's shed in his community, and he had a lot of skills across a lot of areas. They knew what he meant. It was in no way said with anything other than the genuine motive that he could not keep teaching. I do believe, though, that in the end he was of sound mind and he would have elected to take this path if it were available to him, such was his pain.

Palliative care was a wonderful experience for him. The palliative care people I witnessed did some wonderful work. I know they do wonderful work. We have all read material from so many in that profession. How they do it I do not know, but they do it and they do it wonderfully.

That pathway must continue for those who cannot choose the path we are debating here today, but it must be properly funded on an ongoing basis. One issue I want to mention is that vulnerable people are a great concern to me. Who is on their side? As a financial planner for more than 20 years, clients spoke to me about family. Clients spoke to me about the way they were being treated by family and being told, 'Why are you hanging around? Isn't it time you took off, got rid of yourself?' It was absolutely soul-destroying to hear it, but it is out there. Who is going to look after those vulnerable people?

I have thought long and hard on this very issue. There is no complete answer. Indeed, this legislation may save some. Subtle coercion is almost impossible to combat, but whether this bill passes or not the coercion will still be there. I am aware that the disability community has major concerns in that regard. Are there flaws in this bill? Yes. Hopefully, members will support the member for Toowoomba South's amendments, which I believe will help address the subtleties I am talking about and other things.

Like many members, I consulted my community in a regular survey. Of almost 1,500 respondents over time, almost four in five said yes to the question 'Should the Queensland parliament debate voluntary assisted dying legislation?' I agree with the sentiments of the crossbench who put forward the amendment. I think \$275 million a year in palliative care services would go a long way to assisting the whole of Queensland. I did not have an opportunity to speak on that because that debate was cut short by the Leader of the House, as is her right, but it would have been a good opportunity for us all to say a few more words in that regard. At the end of this debate, I will vote with my head but with my heart at the centre of my decision.