




Speech By
Nikki Boyd

MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Ms BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (11.38 am): My position on voluntary assisted dying is not a new one. It is one that has long been in the public arena. From the outset, I want to be clear that I understand and respect that people have different views on this topic, but my conscience has led me to only one conclusion.

Upon reflection, this position has been one formed for almost three-quarters of my life—when I was 11, as my family gathered around my paternal grandfather. Pop was a teacher in every way and was always there for my big childhood challenges: learning to tie my shoelaces, mastering maths and time. Truth be told, I really only mastered my laces and I am pretty confident I may have been the least successful student ever.

He was a headmaster, a father and a grandfather. He looked forward to embracing his retirement at Woolli fishing on the family farm, in the shed fixing or building, and spending time with his loved ones. That was cut short with a sudden terminal cancer diagnosis. He chose to pass away at the 'forever farm' he built with my grandmother. He was a proud man. He lived a dignified life. His death, despite palliative care, was long and agonising and there was no sense of dignity in it. Twenty-seven years on, with great clarity I remember his tiny ravaged frame wasting without sustenance and his rattled, haunting gasps will remain ever clear in my mind. It was a loss and a defining event in our family's lives.

My mother, a registered nurse, then devoted the rest of her working life to becoming a solely palliative care nurse, assisting people to pass at home. Any family member of a nurse will let you know that the dinner table conversation enables you to establish a pretty strong stomach. You are always braced for chatter about bodily fluids and gore. Our meals always included the inevitability of death as mum scoured the obituaries in the morning's paper or talked about the palliative case that was at the forefront of her mind as we unpacked our day.

I want to put on record my and my community's respect and admiration for the stoic health professionals who work in this difficult healthcare space. I have been privileged to get to know many of them. They have a great strength, resilience and such a lovely outlook on life and death. It certainly takes a very special person. Over many years, surrounded by these people from my adolescence onward, I have come to what may be considered to be a simplistic or blunt view. Palliative care, while supporting the patient and the family to uphold quality of life, is in essence a gradual euthanising.

It is often said that only three things in life are certain: birth, death and change. While properly funding palliative care is essential, no amount of funding or resourcing of palliative care leads to any different outcome. Death is certain; it just comes gradually. Voluntary assisted dying alters that. It provides choice and dignity over the timing of imminent death. It brings with it comfort and the potential to avoid unimaginable suffering. I do not want to continue to live in a Queensland where people feel compelled to quietly or covertly take their own lives, often in many cases after many unsuccessful attempts, because there is not a legal framework in place for release to guide medical practitioners and patients at the end of life.

Just as death is certain, so too is change. As legislators, it is our role to provide Queensland with a safe, considered and workable framework that reflects the wishes of modern Queensland. This bill delivers that. Palliative care and VAD are not mutually exclusive, and I do not subscribe to arguments that prioritise one over the other. They can work in parallel and intersect. Fundamentally, I believe that terminally ill people should be able to choose the way they depart this world. Once provided with that choice research tells us that many do not enact it, but it brings great comfort and relief in the knowledge that choice and control exist for them.

I wholeheartedly support this legislation. It provides the right framework and safeguards for our community. I commend the work of our parliamentary committees, the Queensland Law Reform Commission, stakeholders, the Premier, Deputy Premier, health minister and Attorney-General to bring this legislation to this point—a journey stretching back some years and including many thousands of hours of work. I particularly pay homage to the member for Thuringowa. I have worked on committees with him before and I have seen how much he gives, how much heart he puts in. He is to be commended for his fine work.

I want to conclude my contribution with the words of my beloved friend, Harrison Thompson, as he endures his own cancer battle right now. Harry is 23 years old. As he fights leukaemia from hospital he penned some words that I want to place on the record of this debate. Harry says—

I've always supported the right for someone to choose how they pass at the end of their life, but it took my recent cancer diagnosis to truly & personally understand the importance of having that right.

For me, it's the right to choose to pass with dignity, on my terms.

To have the right not to suffer.

The right to choose to NOT have my family and friends watch me pass in pain.

I speak to nurses and doctors and other patients every day that preach the importance of allowing true autonomy over your life when it is needed most.

No one wants to die. But if something were to happen, or my treatment doesn't work

I deserve the right to choose to pass with dignity. As does everyone.

I choose dignity and choice for our terminally ill. I commend the bill without amendment to the House.