




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR THEODORE

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VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Theodore—LNP) (4.12 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate about voluntary assisted dying. As always, I would like to thank the committee members for their extensive work on this bill and all of those who took the time to make a submission on such an emotive issue.

Life is certainly sacred. Those who are terminally ill fundamentally do not want to die. They want to live to see loved ones, to see the sun rise and to see the sun set. They want to know that they are not alone and that they have loved ones around them. My grandfather died on my 18th birthday after fighting cancer for many years. He died with family standing around him at the Gold Coast Hospital. Cancer slowly ate his body away to a point where he was just skin and bones. He was a proud man who served king and country in many theatres of conflict, a man who was truly stubborn and never knew how to give up.

My grandmother, the anchor of our family, passed away a few years later in Beaudesert Hospital after suffering a debilitating illness. Like my grandfather, she died with family around her. I wish to thank the hospital staff for all their efforts in making their final days as comfortable as possible. These hospital staff are the true heroes of this debate. Their care and compassion should not have a dollar value, as it was certainly priceless to my family and everybody who was attending.

As highlighted in this debate, there are many who do not actually have access to suitable palliative care, especially in regional Queensland. This is an issue that desperately needs addressing. The care we have in South-East Queensland, you could say, is second to none, but those in regional areas miss out.

I class myself as a Christian, but that does not stop me believing that people should have a choice over their own life. I regularly meet with a local pastor who is a great friend and I enjoy a good philosophical debate with him. Being a Catholic and him a Protestant certainly does make things very interesting.

Life and death matters are always an emotive issue and that can bring out a variety of differing opinions. I felt it appropriate to discuss this legislation with my local LNP members at a special meeting and to take their guidance. Their decision was unanimous—that is, put the question to the people of Theodore. In a recent newsletter, I gave residents a brief overview of the legislation and asked them to vote yes or no and add their comments. Interestingly, many opinions showed they did not actually understand the bill itself. They lacked a clear guidance of what the bill was trying to set out. There were also those who wished to expand the bill and take in other illnesses and severe disabilities.

I noted that many health practitioners were vocal with their thoughts. The majority were against the proposed laws on ethical or religious grounds. Some reinforced the argument of better palliative care as they felt it was a more humane option. They also felt the legislation needed further amendments—similar to those amendments which will be moved by the member for Toowoomba South—to further enhance safeguards and limit the chances of abuse.

I have always believed government should get out of the way of ordinary people and allow them the right to make the decision to live their lives as they see fit. However, these decisions should not impede on the rights of others. Therefore, it leaves me with a dilemma. Whilst I personally agree with the right of the individual to take charge of their own life, I also do not believe you should force a medical practitioner who has a conscientious objection to this course of action to search for and provide another medical provider who would be in favour of this action. This also relates to care facilities which have an objection to voluntary assisted dying on their premises.

In addition, I may not personally agree with euthanasia but I do respect the residents of the Theodore electorate—the overall, yet very, very slim, majority of whom voted in favour of the legislation. Furthermore, I have deep concerns that the VAD laws will be abused by a small minority.

In closing, as I stated, I have a fundamental belief that we all should have a choice to live our life and end it as we see fit, but we need to respect the rights of others who wish not to participate. All I ask is for members in this chamber to give the doctors the option and the facilities the option to opt in and opt out without repercussion. No matter how minor their involvement, it is all about choice. It is all about giving the person the final say if they wish to participate or not.