

## VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

*Legislative Assembly Second Reading Debate – copied from Hansard 25 November 2021*

**Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth—Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation) (11:16):** I make a contribution to debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 on behalf of the communities across the Tamworth electorate. This topic is highly emotive and deeply personal, and my office has heard passionate commentary contributions from many. The grassroots debates that have been had around the dinner tables or in the workplace lunchrooms by members of my community in the Tamworth electorate are the views that I bring to the New South Wales Parliament. I bring the lived experience of, and the deeply emotional connection to, an issue that personally affects my constituents as citizens of New South Wales and as mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and relatives. Those debates shape community feeling and change hearts and minds. As the member for Tamworth I assured my constituents that I would acknowledge and listen to those debates.

The bill covers a deeply important issue, and it was critical to me that the Tamworth community had the opportunity to drive the decision-making on this issue. I made a commitment to listen to the people of the Tamworth electorate and to take their voices forward to the New South Wales Parliament. That is why I took the final draft of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 to my community for widespread consultation. The first steps were to ensure that I provided my electorate with all the information they needed to make an informed decision, to allow constituents to engage with my office if they wished and to register their vote. I wanted to allow the entire electorate the opportunity to have their say, and that meant doing everything I could to make it as easy as possible for them to engage and to register their view.

I started my community consultation campaign by establishing an online survey through my website. That resulted in an incredible 3,762 responses from communities across the electorate, including Tamworth, Gunnedah, Walcha, Werris Creek, Manilla, Dungowan and more. I sent an electorate-wide mail-out survey to every household in the community that gave residents the opportunity to privately and confidentially let me know their view: "yes" or "no". I also engaged with local papers across the region and provided the link to my survey in my fortnightly mail-outs three times.

I invited local media to receive regular updates to engage it to increase awareness of the upcoming debate on the bill, introduced by the member for Sydney.

Those actions were vital to get an accurate view from my community. I thank each and every one of those people who responded for engaging with this process and telling me their views on this very important issue. The responses were personal and honest, and I am grateful so many people from across the Tamworth electorate reached out and shared their views and experiences with me. I am now confident I have a full understanding of the position of the community I serve.

Today I have come to this House to represent the majority view of my community on this deeply personal issue. The vast majority of people in the Tamworth electorate have decided that they support the bill. Of the 4,954 responses my office has received from the Tamworth electorate, some 78.4 per cent support the bill. But the story of Tamworth's support of the bill goes deeper. Tamworth is a big electorate made up of communities of vastly different backgrounds, cultures and experience. What I see from the responses received is that this topic is an incredibly personal issue. It is about families, loved ones, religion, friends, different upbringings and individual experiences. There is no singular culture and identity in the Tamworth electorate. Perhaps more than most, the communities in our region vary in age, size, background and opinion. It was important that I ensured that I was able to canvass views from right across the electorate in a variety of ways.

Of the 4,954 responses my office received on this issue, it is the view of 3,883 that I should support the bill. I have been clear that I would take the majority view of the community and that is what I am doing today. The support represented in the statistics does not discount the 1,071 people in the electorate who voted no to the bill or the people who stopped me in the street to give their view and to share their story as to why they were for or against the bill. Those members of our community have genuine, heartfelt views informed by their own personal experience, faith or morality. I acknowledge them and sincerely thank them for contacting me and ensuring their views were included and their voice was heard.

As a result, I have worked with my parliamentary colleagues, including the member for Sydney, on amendments to provide clarity and strengthen parts of this bill in relation to the decision-making capacity of the

person requesting the option. Other areas of concern exist around coercion, pressure, duress, dementia, elder abuse, eligibility criteria, referrals, recording and notifications, the disability sector, and palliative care options. Those amendments, which I hope will be accepted, provide further safeguards and strengthen the bill in those important areas. Again, I thank my community for their feedback. The responsibility of leadership often means disappointing some. For those who are disappointed by this result, please know that you have been heard and amendments to the bill will be moved in relation to safeguards. I made a commitment that I would consult widely and I have done so. I made a commitment that I would take the majority view forward when it comes time to vote on the bill—and today I do so. I deeply thank my community for their trust in me.