

## VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

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

**Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba) (16:45):** I contribute to debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. It took me a long time to decide to speak on this legislation. That is not to say I have not given it a lot of thought. Indeed, I have spent an enormous amount of time working through this. In that time, I have met with numerous people representing views on both sides of the argument surrounding the bill, and I have received many pieces of correspondence in relation to it. Some have had a clear-cut view with limited scope for movement, whilst others have expressed a more nuanced view in relation to possible amendments, some of which I will likely support. As with all decisions of such an important nature, this is not something to gloss over. I have given each person and group an opportunity to share their view in forming mine.

I choose to speak because ultimately I want on the record the shaping of my decision in this regard. I owe it to the many people I have spoken with on this issue. I owe it to my constituents and I owe it to myself to know that when the time came I stood up and gave an account of myself. I have always felt that it is better to say something for the purpose of clarity than to leave a gap for others to infer what may have been. I make no judgement of those who have spoken before me. I make no judgement of those who choose not to speak. I can only make a judgment of myself.

Colleagues, like me, have been afforded a conscience vote, and I respect what they have to say. I may not agree with every member's view, in the same way that some will not agree with me, but I respect that each individual decision is arrived at from a number of personal experiences. No-one knows the true experience of anybody else and no-one has the right to be judgemental on issues such as these. I have listened to most of the speeches and have been moved by arguments for and against the bill. I will say this: I do not believe there have been manufactured or concocted beliefs. Each person is passionate about their view and, as elected representatives of diverse communities, passion is what we should expect of all parliamentarians.

I thank all of those who have spoken, and I especially thank those who have articulated their points with dignity and respect. An issue such as this deserves to be debated with respect. I have been disappointed in speeches that antagonise opposing viewpoints and belittle other viewpoints, regardless of what view that may be. This debate, and the position individuals arrive at, is not about political viewpoints. Rather, it is about deep-seated personal views. We do ourselves a disservice when we antagonise people because they hold a different view on something they feel strongly about. Whatever you think of the legislation, disrespect and patronising language is not the answer. In that sense, I have been troubled by inferences that respective views have been argued by individuals in this place in a way that suggests those speakers are the sole holders of compassion, care and ethics. I hope that every one of us, regardless of how we vote, holds those very traits.

Growing up, I was taught that I did not have to agree with everyone but I owed them the respect of hearing them out. I learnt to understand that I had to respect their view and their truth, especially in arguments on emotive topics. We are a sum of our parts—our life experiences, our social construct, our belief systems and our upbringing. As such, I do not feel it is right to be antagonistic. As I have said, each person makes a decision based on what they feel comfortable with, but no-one should be pilloried because of their view on assisted dying. I have read testimonies from surviving family members representing both sides of the argument. It can be polarising, but it need not be. Some of the amendments that have been circulated improve the bill, whilst others serve to create a situation that further polarises the issue. Whilst there may be differing views, I do not want to see a polarisation.

I have seen the compassion on both sides of the argument. The common thread between everyone I have met is that of love. Falling on one side of the argument does not mean you love any less than someone on the other side of the argument. I have had many discussions with my family, friends and colleagues about this issue. Those discussions have not occurred in an echo chamber. To do that is to avoid challenging your thoughts, and it limits your personal growth. Discussions have been respectful and always valuable, even when it was clear there was a differing view. I have reflected on death and my experiences of it with loved ones. I have thought about the final moments I spent with loved ones who have passed.

I remember the nights I spent sleeping in a hospital chair in between uni classes while my 26-year-old uncle, who was more a friend and older brother to me, lost his life to illness. I will never forget the silent tears when someone not much older than me—a hero of mine—passed. It was something I never considered fair, but

had to accept. I remember my grandmother, who tried to hide the fact that I was her favourite grandchild, and for whom I credit my beautiful life because of her constant prayers as she neared the end of her life. I remember holding her hand until the last moments. I remember carrying her coffin, still not quite wanting to believe it was over. I remember crying with my younger brother as we came to the realisation that his beautiful wife would not survive her leukaemia diagnosis. Their whole life was ahead of them; they had only been married a few months. All of that evaporated in an instant. I remember being a protective big brother moments after he buried her. You do not forget those things. Our experiences are the sum of our parts.

During those times, I remember the love we all had. I remember each burial and the acute hurt and pain we felt. I remember the tears, the hugs, the prayers, the memorials and the gardens and charitable acts in their names. Those examples are not unique to me. Everyone here would have similar stories. They are not told to elicit sympathy or seek justification; they are merely my experiences, my truth and the catalyst for the decision I have made when it comes to end of life. Decisions about life and death are not easy ones, but in this place today we are asked to vote on things that ultimately are about that very issue. Those decisions weigh heavily on our conscience and, if they did not, I would be very worried.

I have had many pieces and forms of correspondence directly addressed to me. However, my electorate specifically has fallen overwhelmingly on one side of the argument—that of not supporting the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. Whilst I have spent a substantial period with a range of people and appreciate both sides of the argument, I too find it very difficult to support the notion of voluntary assisted dying. In addition to my personal experiences, I recognise that, as an MP, I have a responsibility to reflect the views of those who honour me by allowing me to be their voice in this Parliament. That is not unusual. Many of my colleagues have reflected on their respective electorate views in relation to part of their decision-making.

My electorate is very diverse; however, it could also be identified as socially conservative. There is a very strong vein of multiple faiths running through the suburbs, and there are also many people who do not practise faith. There are those who practise and others whose physical presence may have lapsed but their internal belief has not. My community has shown their spirit, their commitment to help others and their generosity at times when people needed it. We saw this in particular during the bushfire and flood crises. Our community did all they could to help others who were hundreds of kilometres away.

The general opposition of my community to the bill is not because they are in any way less loving or they are in some ways not progressive; it is because they make decisions based on their lived experience, their personal sum of parts. Many people and big local organisations from my electorate contacted me and their opposition to the bill was overwhelming in comparison to the people who came to me to express support for the bill. There may be many people, including some close friends and people I love and respect dearly, who disagree with my decision, and they are entitled to do that. But as I said, we are asked on very rare occasions to participate in a conscience vote in this place. In this instance, my conscience does not allow me to support the bill. *[Extension of time]*

I note that many members have spoken before me and they have raised a multitude of issues that we need to address. Ultimately it is neither a zero-sum game nor a decision to improve things in one way or another. We have heard about the need to improve many things, including palliative care—and no-one disagrees with that regardless of whether they support the bill or not. We need to provide better services to those who are dying as well as provide care and support to their families. None of those things are contingent on the success or failure of this bill alone. It is a challenge to all of us to improve things no matter what.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge people who have worked exceptionally hard. I acknowledge the work of many MPs, particularly the member for Sydney and the many co-sponsors of the bill. I also acknowledge the members who have a different view who have been able to articulate their point. They may have different views, but we can still acknowledge the work that they do and the passion for and commitment to their belief. In fairness, we all need to do that. There is probably not enough talk about fairness and we do not acknowledge people. More often than not, we end up deciding to support someone who supports us. But acknowledgement is good, and I acknowledge the people who have worked hard on the bill. Whilst I do not support the bill, I respect the process and whatever is the outcome. Wherever we may land on this legislation, let us be cognisant that we need to do more to assist people in their greatest time of need; that everyone is afforded dignity, care and compassion in their final moments, no matter how those final moments may come about.