

## VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

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

**Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10:32):** I advise the House that I oppose the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 as it stands. I entered this place with a commitment to protect the sanctity of life, and that has not changed in the 10½ years that I have been here. It is because of my commitment to protect the sanctity of life that I opposed the abortion bill, and it is the reason I will always oppose and continue to speak against those who advocate for a return to capital punishment. My view is not dissimilar to the view expressed by the former Labor Minister J.J. Maloney, who in 1955 when discussing similar legislation relating to the taking of a life said, "The sanctity and inviolability of life are as binding on the State as on man." He made those comments identifying that this legislation is not legislation that should be considered in the same way as other legislation and that is why I pay credit to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition for allowing us a conscience vote while neither of them hid their personal positions. That is the stuff leaders are made of.

My position is not based on blind endorsement of Catholic theology because I am not a Catholic. I will add that my wife is a Catholic, and she is advocating for me to support the legislation. You can imagine the tone of conversation going on in our house at the moment. My wife has her views as a constituent of mine, as do many in my electorate. There have been strong advocates for the legislation in my electorate, and there have been passionate opponents. Those opinions come from a place of faith, some come from a place of medicine and others come from a place of personal experience. All three have advocated for various positions, both for and against. Unlike the previous member, I cannot come to the House with a thorough knowledge of where my electorate stands on the position because it has been so varied. The reasons for that are so varied as well.

Like all members of the House, I will speak about my own personal experience, which is why I oppose the bill as it stands. It was just two years ago that I was in a very difficult personal position, with my father and father-in-law both passing away and my wife's recovery from cancer hit a few bumps. It is on public record that we had horrific bushfires at that time as well. As the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, I worked 104 days straight. Just to add to the excitement, one of my sons was doing the HSC. Personally, it was a difficult time. My mother had only just entered a nursing home with dementia. She was also doing it tough. There was significant pressure on me as her only son, and as her primary guardian I saw her quite regularly because she was very ill.

One time I went to see my mother and she just looked at me and said, "I want to die." That was heartbreaking, particularly since I had only just lost my father. I was in such a delicate position as her power of attorney because if laws like this had been enacted, I probably would not have stood in her way. But I can advise the House that the beauty of modern medicine means that two Saturdays ago I had morning tea with my mother. We had a lovely conversation, but the dementia is hitting her hard. I am grateful for the member for Sydney identifying that there will be lots of carve outs in the legislation. I understand dementia was quite rightly one that he advocated for. That is the position that many of us will be in. We will be emotional wrecks when those decisions have to be made. People may believe that the end of their life is upon them but medicine, time or, dare I say it, a miracle might mean that they extend their life for a day or a year or, in my mother's case, two more years.

I am grateful to my friend the member for Sydney for the time he has put into the debate. I believe him to be an honourable man, and that this has come from a good place for him. As I have said to members of the House before, I have always been committed to the sanctity of life. I consider the legislation in the same vein as abortion laws and capital punishment laws. We either believe in the sanctity of life, or we do not. Like all of us here, personal experience will unfortunately have some influence on the way we approach the legislation. I appeal to the members of this House to look deep into their conscience, which I believe they will do; consider the opinions of their constituents, which I believe they will; and ensure that whatever amendments come forward make the legislation better and stronger and that they are in the best interests of the people of New South Wales.