

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

Legislative Assembly Second Reading Debate – copied from Hansard 12 November 2021

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (15:32): I make a contribution to debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021, which is likely to be one of the most significant pieces of legislation that I will speak on in my time in this place. When I entered Parliament I made a commitment to my community that I would listen to them. More than 800 years ago St Francis returned from the Middle East. After meeting with Sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil, his message to his follows was to listen more and talk less—wise advice that I made a commitment to follow. For this reason I sought the opinions of my constituents on this topic and legislation in a manner unlike with any other piece of legislation. Due to the gravity of the bill, I believed consultation was more important than ever.

More than 12 months ago, when whispers of this legislation were first heard, I began to seek the opinions of my constituents. I created a community consultation page on my website and I ensured that my community newsletter, which goes to each and every household—regardless of whether a constituent is on the electoral roll— gave people the opportunity to express their opinions on voluntary assisted dying. In addition to the newsletter, on multiple occasions I sought the feedback of my community by advertising in *The Beast* magazine and *Eastern Suburbs Life*. I also included a call for community consultation in my regular community e-newsletter. I received over 1,000 responses to a survey on the issue, the results of which revealed that 87.8 per cent of respondents from the Coogee electorate support the introduction of voluntary assisted dying legislation in New South Wales— 911 in support and 127 opposed. In addition to my survey, I received 111 emails regarding this legislation, of which 19 were opposed and 92 were in support. That means that 83 per cent of the correspondence that I received on this legislation is in support while 17 per cent is opposed.

I have also sought research and data from other reputable sources. An analysis of Vote Compass 2019 shows that voters in every electorate across New South Wales support the introduction of voluntary assisted dying legislation. The levels of support in individual electorates ranged from 64 per cent to 83 per cent. The overall support for voluntary assisted dying in New South Wales was 77 per cent, with only 11 per cent opposed. In the electorate of Coogee, 8 per cent of people polled agreed that terminally ill patients should be able to end their own lives with medical assistance. This polling also shows people's responses based on their religious affiliations. In the Coogee electorate, 78 per cent of Catholics, 80 per cent of Anglicans, 72 per cent of other Christians and 85 per cent of non-Christians agree that terminally ill patients should be able to end their own lives with medical assistance.

I support the bill because my constituents in the electorate of Coogee elected me to represent them in this place, and they have overwhelmingly told me that they expect me to support this legislation. After making a commitment to listen to my community when I entered the Parliament, I cannot, in good conscience, vote against a piece of legislation that they overwhelmingly support. I made a commitment that I would listen, and that is what I am doing today. I foreshadow that I will move an amendment to improve the bill. Through my consultation, doctors and medical practitioners have highlighted their concerns that doctors who conscientiously object must provide information about voluntary assisted dying services. This concern has also been flagged by the Australian Medical Association. As such, I will move an amendment to the bill to remove the requirement for a doctor who conscientiously objects to provide information approved by the Secretary of NSW Health to the person seeking voluntary assisted dying services. Medical practitioners from across the State have told me that they want this amendment. I commend the bill to the House.