

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

Legislative Assembly Second Reading Debate – copied from Hansard 19 November 2021

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse) (09:37): I contribute to debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. We bring to this debate in the Parliament our own life experiences and perspectives. The issues of death and how we reconcile with death provoke deep passion and emotion, as they have throughout civilisation. Euthanasia and voluntary assisted suicide or death goes to the heart of our view of the nature of human life and our hopes and beliefs. Despite the range of views put forward in this debate, it has been the most respectful of all debates I have seen during my 10 years in Parliament. I sincerely thank my colleagues.

I have listened to the feedback on the bill received by my electorate office. There have been lots of standard campaign emails, and there has been a relative balance of views in the original correspondence that has come through. For me, a conscience vote in this House on the bill means that I can vote according to my own conscience. It is a rare and precious opportunity, and pays respect to the deeply personal and ethical issues raised by the bill. I do not support the bill. For me, it is not so much about the detail of the bill, the safeguards or the long and complex provisions. Life is the most precious thing of all. By making it legal to assist a terminally ill person to end their life, the bill crosses a line and devalues life. It takes away hope and puts the lives of vulnerable people at risk.

The bill also goes against so much of what we do to preserve life in our community and through the Parliament's work, including the actions we took during COVID to protect our elderly and vulnerable and the important assistance we offer people who attempt suicide. So much of what we do in our everyday lives and what we do in this very House helps to preserve lives and provide hope.

I can deeply understand the concern of those who have watched their loved ones suffer and their ardent wish for there to be another way to take that suffering away. My first experience of that was when my parents took me as a five-year-old to visit my paternal grandmother in her hospital bed. She had had a long-suffering illness and she was very close to death. In her suffering, my grandmother was unrecognisable. That experience has profoundly affected me and continues to. We all want to relieve the suffering of those who are terminally ill, but there is another way to assist them than by helping them taking their own lives. I profoundly welcome the Premier's commitment to build a world-class palliative care system. It is one we must, as a government, build rapidly. We must ensure that people in our regional and remote areas have equitable access to those facilities and services. We must provide that pathway to honour and act on the fact that life is the most precious thing of all. I thank the House.