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Subject: Assisted Dying Bill progresses with majority of speakers in favour; Lord Field, Baroness Davidson among Peers declaring change of mind on issue
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**Assisted Dying Bill progresses with majority of speakers in favour;
Lord Field, Baroness Davidson among Peers declaring change of
mind on issue**

- **Lord Field, who revealed terminal diagnosis, Baroness Davidson, making maiden speech today, Lord Forsyth, Baroness Warsi, Lord Hogan-Howe, Baroness Symons, Lord Lancaster among those stating new support for assisted dying law this week**
- **Baroness Meacher, who proposed Bill, reveals today she broke law to help dying friend**
- **Supporters include representatives from judiciary, police and religion**
- **Assisted Dying Bill passes unopposed to Committee Stage for first time in 7 years**

The Assisted Dying Bill passed unopposed today (Friday 22 October 2021) following its Second Reading debate in the House of Lords, with high profile Peers revealing a dramatic shift in views.

Former MP Lord Field revealed today that he is terminally ill and now supports the legalisation of assisted dying, having previously voted against, in words read out by close friend and proposer of the Bill, Baroness Meacher:

“I’ve just spent a period of time in a hospice... if I had been [able to participate in today’s debate] I’d have spoken strongly in favour of the Second Reading. I changed my mind on assisted dying when an MP friend was dying of cancer and wanted to die early before the full horror effects set in, but was denied this opportunity.”

Baroness Davidson, former leader of the Scottish Conservatives, used her maiden speech today to support the Bill, after voting against in the Scottish Parliament in 2015.

Lord Forsyth (former Conservative cabinet member), Baroness Warsi (former co-chairwoman of the Conservative Party and senior minister for Faith), Lord Hogan-Howe (former Met Commissioner), Baroness Symons (former Labour cabinet member and trade unionist), and Lord Lancaster (former Conservative minister) have also declared their change of mind on assisted dying this week, having previously voted or spoken against legislation.

There was strong support among the Law Lords, including Lord Neuberger, Lord Mance, Lord Etherton and Lord Brown, and among former police chiefs – Lord Blair, as well as Lord Hogan-Howe. Several Peers of faith spoke in support of the Bill including Lord Carey (former Archbishop of Canterbury), Lord Leigh and Lord O’Donnell.

Of the 133 speakers, not one stated that their view had shifted from support to opposition.

Baroness Meacher, crossbench peer and chairwoman of Dignity in Dying, also revealed in *The Times* today that she had broken the law to help a dying friend make arrangements for an assisted death in Switzerland, before they decided the journey would be too traumatic. She said, "Like many families across the country, I was motivated purely by compassion. But in the eyes of the law, my acts made me a criminal."

Following an eight hour debate, the Assisted Dying Bill progressed unopposed to Committee stage today. The legislation is based on a bill tabled by Lord Falconer in 2014, which was supported by Peers at Second Reading. Two opposition amendments were defeated by large margins at Committee Stage, however the Bill was not able to progress further due to the end of the session prior to the 2015 General Election. The bill is modelled on legislation that has been in place in Oregon, USA for over 23 years, since adopted by nine other American states plus the District of Columbia, five Australian states and New Zealand.

Commenting after the vote, Baroness Meacher said,

"It was powerful to see so many Peers from all sides of the House united in support of my Bill, and queuing up to speak in favour. The House of Lords clearly recognises that it is time to reform our outdated laws, as do the overwhelming majority of the British public. That strength of feeling was demonstrated by the huge gathering of supporters outside the House.

"This issue is not going away. Change is now inevitable, with more countries around the world bringing in assisted dying laws and none repealing them. Momentum is building across the British Isles, with a consultation on a Scottish Assisted Dying Bill underway and the States of Jersey due to debate proposals next month. It is only a matter of time before Parliament catches up with public opinion and does the right thing."

Alison Pickard, a former nurse who now lives with terminal motor neurone disease, said:

"It is truly heartening to see Parliament listening to people like me, who have first-hand experience of the reality of the current law. I do not want to die, but I am dying. I cannot change the final destination, but to influence the journey would provide huge reassurance and peace of mind to me and my family.

"I shouldn't have to choose between travelling hundreds of miles to Switzerland, putting my loved ones at risk of prosecution for helping me, or taking matters into my own hands at home with no guidance at all. I simply want the ability to die peacefully on my own terms, with my family around me, in my own home. This Assisted Dying Bill would give me that assurance. It cannot be passed soon enough."

Sarah Wootton, Chief Executive of Dignity in Dying said,

"Mounting evidence is proving the ban on assisted dying to be uncompassionate, unequal and deeply unsafe. As evidenced in so many speeches today, none of us are protected from the suffering it can cause. including Peers and their loved ones. We

are pleased that attempts to frustrate this debate and wilfully mischaracterise what this Bill calls for were rightly withdrawn.

“This Assisted Dying Bill would bring much-needed choice, compassion and protection to terminally ill people. It would protect families from making the impossible choice between breaking the law or watching a loved one suffer. It would enable healthcare professionals to offer the full range of options their patients want. It would finally bring this 60-year-old law into the 21st century, making the UK a world-leader on end-of-life choice.”

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For more information or interview requests, please contact Ellie Ball, Media & Campaigns Manager, at ellie.ball@dignityindying.org.uk or Thomas Davies, Director of Campaigns and Communications at thomas.davies@dignityindying.org.uk, or call 07725 433 025.

Notes to Editor

Assisted Dying Bill

Baroness Meacher’s Assisted Dying Bill today passed unopposed to Committee Stage, following a Second Reading debate in the House of Lords today (Friday 22 October 2021).

The Bill was selected seventh in the House of Lords private members ballot in May and received its First Reading on Wednesday 26th May 2021. The full text can be found here: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2875>. It is based on a bill introduced by Lord Falconer in 2014. Rob Marris MP introduced a similar bill in 2015 which was defeated in the Commons.

The functioning of the current law on assisted dying was the subject of a Backbench Business Committee Debate in July 2019 and a Westminster Hall debate in January 2020, at which a majority of MPs speaking called for a review of present legislation.

Dignity in Dying

Dignity in Dying campaigns for greater choice, control and access to services at the end of life. It campaigns within the law to change the law, to allow assisted dying as an option for terminally ill, mentally competent adults with six months or less to live.

Assisted dying is prohibited in England and Wales under the Suicide Act (1961), and in Northern Ireland under the Criminal Justice Act (1966) which states that anyone who “encourages or assists a suicide” is liable to up to 14 years in prison. There is no specific crime of assisting a suicide in Scotland, but it is possible that helping a person to die could lead to prosecution for culpable homicide.

Last Resort: The hidden truth about how dying people take their own lives in the UK

In Dignity in Dying’s new report, *Last Resort: The hidden truth about how dying people take their own lives in the UK*, published 17 October 2021, we estimate that between 300 and 650 terminally ill people take their own lives every year under the ban on assisted dying, with ten times as many attempts. This is in addition to the 50 Britons

on average who travel to Switzerland each year to die, and the thousands who suffer at home despite palliative care. New polling released for the report reveal that the vast majority of the public recognise the distinction between assisted dying and suicide, and believe suicide prevention measures should not include preventing terminally ill people from seeking an assisted death.

A condensed version of the report can be accessed here:

<https://features.dignityindying.org.uk/last-resort/>

The full version can be accessed here: <https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Last-Resort-Dignity-in-Dying-Oct-2021.pdf>

Assisted Dying Scotland Bill

Liam McArthur, Lib Dem MSP for Orkney, lodged the 'Assisted Dying Scotland' Members Bill proposal with the Non-Government Bill Unit (NGBU) of the Scottish Parliament in June 2021. A Consultation on the contents of the bill launched in September 2021. The proposal seeks to introduce the right to choose an assisted death for terminally ill, mentally competent adults in Scotland.

Jersey's citizen's jury on assisted dying

The States of Jersey are expected to debate assisted dying proposals in November 2021, after a citizen's jury strongly recommended a change in the law to enable islanders who are terminally ill and unbearably suffering to be able to request medical assistance to end their own life. As British Crown Dependencies, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man are each able to legislate on assisted dying independently from the rest of the British Isles.

Healthcare professionals

The British Medical Association (BMA) last month (Tuesday 14 September 2021) voted to drop its official opposition to a change in the law on assisted dying in favour of neutrality, following a debate at its Annual Representative Meeting.

The largest ever poll of British doctors on assisted dying, conducted by the BMA in February 2020, results of which were released in October 2020, found overwhelming support for a change to the BMA's current stance of opposition to an assisted dying law (61%), and that half of doctors personally support a change in the law (50%).

In March 2019, the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) dropped its longstanding opposition to assisted dying in favour of neutrality following a member survey. The Royal Society of Medicine, Royal College of Nursing (and Royal College of Nursing Scotland), the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society all also hold neutral positions on assisted dying.

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Association of British Neurologists, General Medical Council, General Pharmaceutical Council, Royal College of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Ophthalmologists, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Royal College of Pathologists, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Royal College of Radiologists and Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh have no stated position on a change in the law on assisted dying.

In September 2020, Eminent GPs Prof Aneez Esmail and Sir Sam Everington launched a legal challenge to the Royal College of GPs (RCGP) alongside the Good Law Project and Dignity in Dying over RCGP Council's decision to maintain opposition to assisted dying despite its own survey showing a dramatic shift in GP opinion. The Association for Palliative Medicine and the Royal College of Surgeons of England also hold a stance of opposition to a change in the law on assisted dying.

International developments

In the US, assisted dying as an option for terminally ill, mentally competent adults in their final months of life is legal in 11 jurisdictions: Oregon (1997), Washington, Vermont, Montana, the District of Columbia, California, Colorado, Hawaii, New Jersey, Maine and New Mexico (legislation approved April 2021).

In Australia, assisted dying is a legal choice for terminally ill citizens in Victoria (June 2019), Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland (legislation approved September 2021). A bill has also been tabled in New South Wales.

New Zealand is set to implement an assisted dying law allowing this option for terminally ill, mentally competent citizens in November 2021, following a public referendum on the End of Life Choice Act in October 2020.

Spain passed a law allowing assisted dying in March 2021 to be implemented later this year.

In Ireland, assisted dying is set to be examined by a Special Oireachtas Committee, as recommended by the Justice Committee in July 2021.

Austria's Supreme Court ruled in December 2020 that its blanket ban on assisted dying is unconstitutional and the practice will be decriminalised in limited circumstances by 2022.

Germany began considering potential assisted dying legalisation in January 2021 after its Constitutional Court struck down the ban in 2020.

Canada introduced assisted dying legislation in 2016 permitting those suffering from a grievous and irremediable medical condition.

In Colombia legislation was passed in 2015 which permits those with terminal illness or unbearable suffering to request access to life-ending medication.

Assisted dying is permitted in Switzerland, including for foreign nationals, and broader right-to-die laws are in place in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

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