



Ministry
of Justice

Iain Stewart MP
House of Commons
London
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James Cartlidge MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

MoJ ref: MC91953
Your ref: 1369397

26 November 2021

Dear Iain,

ASSISTED DYING BILL

Thank you for your letter to the Department of Health and Social Care on behalf of several of your constituents about Baroness Meacher's Assisted Dying Bill. Your letter has been transferred to the Ministry of Justice which has responsibility for the law in this area. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for criminal law policy.

Whether there are any circumstances in which it should not be an offence to assist another person to die is something on which there are passionately held but deeply divided views. Even amongst those who support a change in the law, there are differing ideas on where the line should be drawn, what safeguards should be in place and for whom. Conversely, others feel strongly that the law should not be changed and that safeguards will not necessarily give enough protection to vulnerable people who may feel pressure, whether real or perceived, to end their own lives.

The Government's position remains that any change to the law in this emotive and contentious area is a matter for Parliament to decide and an issue of conscience for individual parliamentarians rather than one for Government policy.

Parliament has so far voted against proposals to allow lawful assistance with suicide, including in September 2015 when the House of Commons rejected the Assisted Dying (No.2) Bill by a substantial majority (330 votes to 118). However, this remains an issue of profound public interest and importance and the Assisted Dying Bill introduced by Baroness Meacher on 26 May provides an opportunity for Parliament to consider it afresh.

The Government took a neutral position when the Assisted Dying Bill was debated in the House of Lords on 22 October. The Bill passed Lords Second Reading without a vote. Committee stage – which involves line by line examination of the Bill – has yet to be scheduled.

Wherever one stands on the desirability of legislative change, there is no doubt that all people deserve high-quality, compassionate care at the end of their lives. Indeed, I am sure that compassion drives both sides of the debate on this issue, albeit to different conclusions.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES CARTLIDGE MP