



# Trish Doyle MP

## Member for Blue Mountains



02 4751 3298 | [bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bluemountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au) | 132 Macquarie Rd Springwood NSW 2777

### New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

#### Voluntary Assisted Dying

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I note that the New South Wales Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017 will soon be debated in the Legislative Council. This bill strikes at the heart of so many in our community.

There is nothing more fundamental than a person's right to treatment, palliative care and support when dealing with a terminal or life-changing illness.

Previously in this place, I have spoken about the need for greater investment in palliative care services, particularly in rural and regional areas of this State, and this is something I remain committed to.

However, it is easy for opponents of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017 to see the bill as providing an alternative to skilled and well-funded palliative care, when this is so clearly not the case. This kind of polarising argument denies the fears, needs and concerns of many people facing a terminal illness or suffering unbearable pain in the last months and weeks of their lives.

I am saying that we need both well-funded and well-resourced palliative care as well as other end-of-life options for people whose needs cannot be met by palliative care alone.

What this bill provides is choice for those suffering unbearably, with no hope of recovery, to have access to a medically assisted, quick, peaceful and dignified death. As has been well documented in countries where such legislation exists, a relatively small number of people will choose voluntary assisted dying.

Yet this important legislation provides reassurance for those suffering that should it become too great, they can control when they wish to end their own lives, surrounded by those who love them.

I acknowledge the personal struggles of people living with terminal illness and those involved in the care of the terminally ill, including family members and carers, palliative care doctors and nurses, non-government agencies and support services.

It is currently illegal to assist people facing unbearable pain to end their own suffering. This not only places dying people in an unenviable situation but also places their families and others involved in their care in the same situation.

Should a dying person wish to end their pain and suffering, they may be forced to end their life prematurely and alone so as not to legally implicate their loved ones. Surely this is not the way that an advanced society such as ours should treat people at the end of their lives.

I acknowledge that this legislation raises mixed emotions; however, I believe what must remain at the centre of this debate are the rights and dignity of those suffering. I assert that voluntary assisted dying is a dignified and reasonable choice for competent people to make when their medical condition results in untreatable and incurable suffering and pain.

Further, when they have already lost more than we can imagine, having this choice can be of great psychological benefit. Even if they never take this option, knowing it is possible can provide enormous relief. I urge members to become educated on the issue and familiar with the experience of the countries where assisted dying legislation exists.

Please listen to those directly affected.

Blue Mountains advocate Anne Gabrielides suffers from motor neurone disease. With her husband, Paul, at her side, she sought my support for this legislation to ensure end-of-life choices for terminally ill people.

Anne appealed to me:

*Of all people, you understand the importance of your voice in convincing, negotiating with and inspiring your audience.*

*Similarly, my job up until a year ago was to convince, negotiate and inspire parents of deaf children so they could teach their children how to listen, learn and realise their potential.*

*Our voices, yours and mine, convey many years of learning and experience and now mine has gone.*

*My voice is not the only thing I've lost, but I am not going to take your time or mine complaining about the things I have lost, because they're gone and will never return.*

*I have accepted the fact that this disease is going to win the war but I will win some battles along the way.*

*But I want to win the last battle and die with dignity on my terms when I am good and ready.*

Another constituent and a very dear friend of mine, Maurice Brady, died in January this year, after nearly two decades battling heart failure. End-stage heart failure is said to be one of the scenarios in which voluntary assisted dying should be available.

In Maurice's case this was not an option, and he struggled on until the end finally came.

On behalf of Anne and Maurice, I call on this Parliament to support choice for dying people. When a person arrives at this stage in their life, when their bodies have failed them and they have lost control of everything, the least we can do is provide them with choice and control in deciding when enough is enough.

Vale, Maurice.