

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

Legislative Council

TEXT OF MOTION

Voluntary Assisted Dying Online Portal

Mr GAFFNEY (Mersey) - Mr President, I move -

That:

- (1) The Legislative Council notes that a General Practitioner based on the Northwest Coast of Tasmania who has been involved in approximately 80 cases of Voluntary Assisted Dying under the provisions of the *End-of-Life Choices (Voluntary Assisted Dying) Act 2021* (the Act) has expressed concern about the lack of an electronic portal for the submission of relevant requests, applications and information required under the Act and this has resulted in cumbersome administrative complexities and workload; and
- (2) The Legislative Council further notes that:
 - (a) Tasmania is the only jurisdiction in Australia which has Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation that does not utilise a portal to facilitate the effective and timely transfer of information as required by the legislation;
 - (b) Medical Practitioners are refusing to actively participate in the legislated Voluntary Assisted Dying process because of the cumbersome and time-consuming paper-based system currently in place;
 - (c) Medical Practitioners who have been very supportive of the legislated Voluntary Assisted Dying process are now walking away from the process; and
- (3) The Legislative Council calls upon the Tasmanian State Government to purchase or develop an online portal for use by Primary Medical Practitioners, Consulting Medical Practitioners, Administering Health Practitioners and the Voluntary Assisted Dying Commission established under the Act.

[excerpt]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I rise briefly in support of the motion that we have before us. I thank the member for Mersey for bringing this for discussion today.

It's really important. It's a clear demonstration of the member's ongoing commitment to this and advocacy for Tasmania to have an appropriate, good-quality, safe, accessible, functional system for people to be able to access voluntary assisted dying, where relevant and necessary. I hope that, at some point, you can lay down tools and not have to be such an active advocate for continuing to improve the system. We appreciate that you are still keeping a keen eye on things, and that you're somebody identifiable that people can go to for assistance and to advocate for improvements, which is really important.

I'd also add my thanks to all those in Tasmania who are facilitating this system to be operating and, largely, to be operating well and compassionately and being a really important part of our healthcare landscape now. It's incredible. I hope that it is, as others have observed, a very rewarding thing to be part of, as well as something that's challenging, which brings us to the point of this motion.

It's absolutely astonishing to me that we would be risking this system that does interact with incredibly vulnerable members of our community at incredibly difficult times in their lives, by not having something as straightforward as a piece of appropriate technology in place to assist the process to happen efficiently and effectively, and for it not to be a burden on the medical professionals who have to operate and engage with it. We are clearly lagging behind other jurisdictions. There is, it would appear, no need to demonstrate why we should need such a system and such a portal to be in place. Clearly, it's in place in other jurisdictions. It's been clearly identified by people participating in the system here, by medical professionals, that it's required. Now we've heard from the member for Mersey that we will, if we haven't already, be losing medical professionals from being participants in this system because of the lack of this portal - because it's just too onerous without it.

I absolutely support and reiterate the member for Mersey's comments that it is unacceptable to suggest that we wait for a review of the act. I agree, even if that review begins quite soon, it will take a measure of time. We would not expect it to be back with us until a year from now, and then it has to be considered by a government. It would then have to go through a budget process and then eventually, hopefully, end up in a budget some years down the track before we would see a portal as a result of the review. Why should we have to wait? Quite frankly, why should we wait and risk losing more valuable medical professionals from this important area of health care in the meantime?

I personally have heard from a number of people who have had some element of interaction with our VAD system. Largely, people have spoken so glowingly about it and how important it's been as a part of a journey for their family or for a loved one. One thing that I'm hoping will also get addressed through the review process - and it's appropriate that the review process would be the spot for this - is what we do in terms of supporting families post a VAD death. Maybe we can be doing more in that space, because that support for grieving families is an area that we haven't turned our mind to quite enough yet.

However, that is not in relation to this motion. It can wait for the review. This portal, though, is without doubt needed. It seems we can draw from other jurisdictions that are currently doing it, and look to implement a straightforward piece of technology that can be put in place here to good effect. If the government suggests that we wait for the review, they're going to hear a lot more

about it in the two-, three-year interim before it might come about through that avenue. Thank you to the member. I support the motion wholeheartedly

Motion agreed to.