

## **Written evidence submitted by Sarah Green MP (ADY0319)**

With reference to the experiences shared with me by my constituents and based on my conviction that theirs are the voices that truly matter in this debate, I wish to submit the evidence below in support of law change to allow terminally ill, mentally competent adults the choice of an assisted death in the UK. With so many citizens in jurisdictions across the US, Australia and New Zealand being offered real choices at the end of their lives, it is time for Parliament to take action and recognise that the current law is unsafe and is failing dying people and their families.

### *John Close*

In 2003, John Close, the brother of my constituent Lesley, became the seventh Briton to travel to the Dignitas clinic for help to die after having lived with MND for two years. Traveling abroad was the only way he was able to have some control over his death. While he achieved the peaceful end he so desired and deserved, Lesley faced the risk of prosecution. The threat of prosecution for assisting someone to die overseas did not act as a deterrent for Lesley who had nothing but compassion and her brother's wishes at heart, but it did contribute to tremendous and wholly unnecessary anxiety at a time of deep sadness.

Since 2003, hundreds more have taken the same journey to Dignitas that John did.

Yet sadly, the financial cost of such a trip means that many terminally ill, mentally capable Britons who want some control over their deaths, do not have access to what Lesley described as the "gift" of medically assisted dying.

### *Geoff Whaley*

In 2015, the police arrived on Ann and Geoff's doorstep to investigate an accusation of domestic abuse—something that shocked them both, given they had shared a loving marriage for 52 years. Ann was put in a police car, driven to the station, locked in an interview room and interviewed under caution.

Having never committed a crime in her life, Ann found herself the subject of a criminal investigation for booking flights and organising an appointment at Dignitas, according to Geoff's wishes: he had been unable to take those actions himself after motor neurone disease had robbed him of the ability to operate his iPad or hold a phone. Having already suffered so much as a result of his illness, Geoff and his family faced further suffering as a result of our law.

Geoff died as he wished at Dignitas. Ann was never prosecuted, but that did not mean that she did not suffer. Director of Public Prosecutions guidelines give some indication of when it is likely that someone will be prosecuted, but that is not enough. While the law imposes a blanket ban, there seems to be an acknowledgement that it will be broken – it is an untidy compromise - it is not good enough.

Ann's arrest prompted Geoff to speak to parliamentarians and explain his choice in his own words. As a parliamentarian, I am disappointed that we have failed to listen and have failed to act.

*The current law is not working*

- The truth about what dying people face in the UK can no longer be ignored. It is a fact that our outdated laws discriminate between those who can and cannot afford an assisted death in Switzerland and criminalise grieving relatives who support their loved ones to exercise control over their deaths.
- Lesley told me that knowing he would have some control over the end of his life was like a weight lifted off her brother's shoulders. In his [open letter to MPs](#), Geoff described it in the same way. Yet, our law meant that John was denied that peace of mind in his own home, and for Ann and Geoff, that relief was cruelly marred by anguish and uncertainty over the future legal consequences for Ann.
- Without a change in the law, terminally ill patients will continue to face cruel choices – being forced to travel to Dignitas to die <sup>1</sup> (at a rate of one a fortnight); ending their lives themselves alone and often in violent ways (about 650 per year)<sup>2</sup>; enduring pain and indignity despite the best efforts of palliative care (17 a day).<sup>3</sup>

#### *The government's role*

- The 2022 e-petition Debate on Legalising assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults was a result of the over 155,000 signatures received and reflects constituents' appetite for law reform
- There has been consistent and overwhelming public support for law change on assisted dying for terminally ill people and this is true regardless of who commissions the poll. The largest poll (Populus 2019) ever conducted on this issue in Britain shows that:
  - 84% of the public back a safeguarded and compassionate assisted dying law
  - 80% of religious people support a change in the law on assisted dying
  - 86% of people living with a disability support assisted dying as a choice for terminally ill people
  - 73% of adults living with advanced or terminal illness support say they would support a law on assisted dying to allow mentally competent, terminally ill adults with six months or less to live the option of an assisted death in this country ([YouGov 2019](#))
- Allowing assisted dying would permit terminally ill people to leave this world in the way they have decided to, with dignity and without the additional pain of knowing that they risk criminalising their loved ones for assisting them in the ultimate act of compassion and love.
- The Government needs to dedicate time, as it has done in the past with regards to other issues of conscience, to debating seriously and on the basis of robust evidence, the issue of assisted dying. In doing so, it must necessarily recognise that the status quo is unsafe and is failing dying people and their families.

---

<sup>1</sup> A detailed report on our law outsourcing death to Dignitas can be found here -

[https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DiD\\_True\\_Cost\\_report\\_FINAL\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DiD_True_Cost_report_FINAL_WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For data and experiences relating to suicides amongst terminally ill people see-

<https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Last-Resort-Dignity-in-Dying-Oct-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The limits of palliative care have been explored here - [https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DiD\\_Inescapable\\_Truth\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DiD_Inescapable_Truth_WEB.pdf)

