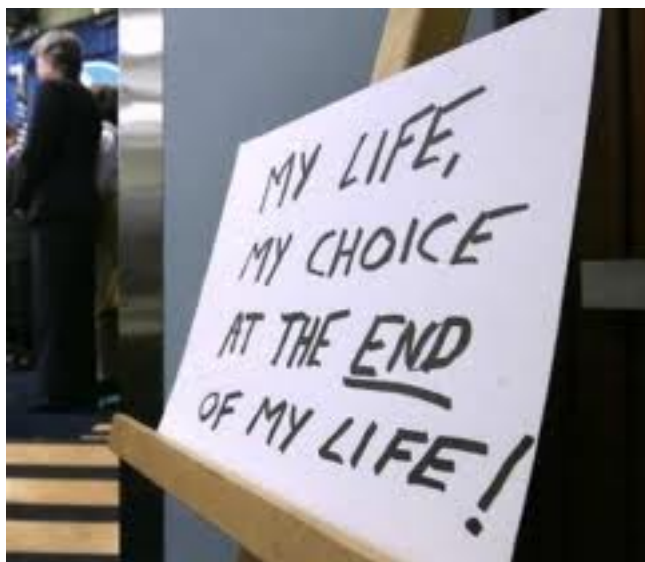


Assisted dying legislation passes despite faith leaders' campaigning



Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying bill, which would allow doctors to hasten the death of terminally ill patients thought to have under six months to live, passed its second reading in the Lords on Friday despite vigorous campaigning by faith leaders, and now passes to committee stage.

The Bill needs Government backing to proceed and although Prime Minister David Cameron has said he is worried about steps towards legalising euthanasia, he is also happy for the Commons to debate the bill. Labour is likely to allow the bill to be debated in the House of Commons if elected.

During Friday's ten-hour debate, Rabbi Julia Neuberger condemned as "nonsense" the stipulation that two doctors could judge that patients have a life expectancy of six months or less.

Baroness (Jane) Campbell of Surbiton, born with spinal muscular dystrophy, said the Bill was "frightening" and was aimed at her whether she wanted it or not.

Baroness Campbell is a former commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and patron of the think tank Living and Dying Well.

Speaking from her electric wheelchair in the House of Lords second reading debate on the Bill, Lady Campbell said: "I do not want this Bill. Before anyone disputes [it is about me], imagine it is already law and that I asked for assistance to die. Do you imagine I would be refused? No. You can be sure there would be doctors and lawyers willing to support my right to die. Sadly many would put their energies into that, rather than improving my situation or helping me to change my mind.

"This bill offers no comfort to me. It frightens me because in periods of greatest difficulty I know I might be tempted to use it. It only adds to the burdens and challenges life holds for me."

She described the bill as a "runaway train" and urged for ways to reflect further. "The bill is not the answer."

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Cardinal Vincent Nichols were among the religious leaders who signed a letter opposing the legislation while bishops and England and Wales have wrote

to their dioceses urging Catholics to write to peers and members of parliament.

Last month Baroness Campbell wrote in The Tablet that the legislation was “misguided and dangerous”.

Ruth Gledhill, Abigail Frymann Rouch- The Tablet