

Marie Goldman

MP for Chelmsford

Why I made the difficult decision to support the Assisted Dying Bill

THERE'S an old saying in politics (often misattributed to Lenin). It says: "There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen." Regardless of who said it, it certainly rings true at the moment. Let me tell you about my week last week to prove my point.

The week started off relatively quietly. Monday was only particularly notable to me because, in my role as Lib Dem Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, I was the spokesperson in the House of Commons chamber for a debate on a motion about the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS), which is the relatively new system that handles complaints about MPs and staff in the House of Commons.

The motion, from the Leader of the House, should have been uncontroversial as it was simply formalising a recommendation from something called the Kernaghan Review, an independent report published last year, which made recommendations about how to strengthen and improve the ICGS.

It was therefore very disappointing to see amendments tabled to the motion by the Conservatives, which would have done the exact opposite, including removing the opportunity for complainants to support each other in bringing forward group complaints. Other amendments would have opened up part of the scheme to political interference. Again, something I think has no place in a complaints system.

In the end, these amendments didn't go through, but I think it's very sad to see any politician trying to take away rights from others for mutual support, especially where there are legitimate grievances.

Tuesday was a momentous thanks to one specific amendment to the Report Stage of the Crime and Policing Bill: New Clause 1 (NC1). It passed by 379 votes to 137 and signified the biggest shift in abortion law for decades. This tiny new clause just said the following:

"For the purposes of the law related to abortion, including sections 58 and 59 of the Offences



Marie Goldman MP carried the 'P' for Pride in the march through Chelmsford city centre
MARIE GOLDMAN MP

Against the Person Act 1861 and the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, no offence is committed by a woman acting in relation to her own pregnancy."

Just a few words, but a huge leap in protection for pregnant women acting in relation to their own pregnancies, meaning that any woman terminating her own pregnancy cannot be prosecuted for doing so.

It felt an enormous privilege to add my name to this amendment and to vote in support of it. First and foremost, I think women terminating their pregnancy should be shown support and compassion, not investigation and criminalisation. Secondly, over recent years, the number of women being subjected to misplaced suspicion, investigation and even prosecution when they have miscarried later in pregnancy has convinced many people of the need for a change to the law to prevent that from happening. NC1 did just that.

NC1 was brought forward by Tonia Antoniazzi MP, and it had the support of various organisations, including the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS).

Another clause, NC20, proposed by Stella Creasy MP, sought to do the same thing, but it was far more complicated, had lots of poorly understood legal implications, which could have had unintended consequences, and was not supported by any of these large organisations. For those asking why I did not add my

name to NC20, this is why. In the end, NC1 was voted on and passed first, which meant that NC20 was withdrawn as they would have conflicted with each other.

On Thursday, I gave my first-ever keynote speech. It was to the Institute for Government, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Nolan Principles, which are core values underpinning standards in public life. You can watch my speech and the following Q&A here: <https://bit.ly/20250619IFG>.

Friday was the Third Reading of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, also known as the Assisted Dying Bill. It was the final vote by MPs before the Bill could progress to the House of Lords. I voted in favour of it.

Let me be clear: this was not an easy decision, nor should it be. Parliament was being asked to consider one of the most morally complex and emotionally charged issues we may ever face as legislators. But behind every argument and debate there are real people, facing real pain, often at the most vulnerable point in their lives.

I want to take a moment to thank everyone who wrote to me about this Bill, especially those who shared personal stories, experiences and reflections. Whether you supported or opposed the Bill, I read your messages with care, compassion and deep respect.

Many have expressed concerns about how we protect the vulnerable, and I share those concerns. However, after hearing from colleagues and personal testimonies, I believe that the safeguards in the Bill have been made substantially stronger.

I support the inclusion of an independent panel to ensure decisions are made with the utmost care and oversight. I believe this should be a panel of experts rather than a High Court judge. We must acknowledge that this is not simply a legal question; it's a profoundly human one.

And we must remember that the vulnerable include within their number those with a terminal illness, often facing a horrible death that no amount of palliative care will substantially relieve. Choosing not to move forward with this Bill would, I believe, remove choice and the option for relief from those in the final days and weeks of their life.

Importantly, this Bill is not about replacing or undermining palliative care. The two are not mutually exclusive.

It is entirely possible to have a compassionate option for those in need, while also having a fully funded and protected palliative care system. Many people receive excellent palliative support, but not everyone finds relief. For some, no amount of care can ease the suffering they endure. We must provide a compassionate alternative, not as the default, but as an option.

The heartbreaking truth is that people in the UK are already travelling to Switzerland to end their lives, often in isolation, burdened by fear, and at a substantial emotional and financial cost.

Others suffer in silence, resorting to desperate, hidden acts that leave behind shattered families, haunted by grief, guilt and sometimes even facing police investigations. This is not compassion. This is not dignity. We can, and we must, do better.

This Bill offers something crucial:

choice. For those facing the end of life in pain and fear, the knowledge that they have the option to decide how and when they die can bring peace of mind, even if they never use it.

I understand fears around a "slippery slope." However, as Members of Parliament, it is our role to draw the line. The law can be clear, precise and tightly bound. The slope only slips if we allow it to.

This Bill is not perfect. But these are not perfect circumstances. We do not live in an ideal world, where everyone dies peacefully, pain-free, and surrounded by loved ones. We live in the real world – one where I fervently believe compassion must guide our laws.

Once again, I want to thank all those who reached out to me. Whether you agree with my position or not, I am grateful for your engagement and for helping me reflect on what is at stake.

And while we discussed profound issues of life and death in Parliament last week, it was wonderful to celebrate human diversity at Essex Pride in Central Park, Chelmsford, on Saturday.

I'm not convinced there is a more joyful, colourful or welcoming experience than Pride and it was an honour to again be at the front of the march through Chelmsford High Street, this time carrying the 'P' for Pride.

Well done to everyone involved in creating such a wonderful event, with a special shout out to Heydi from Heydi Party Decorations for outdoing herself once again with her amazing balloon sculptures, which brought so many smiles and proud colour to the event.

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