

British Lords hold ten-hour debate on assisted dying

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Members of Britain's unelected House of Lords spent almost ten hours on Friday discussing whether to legalise assisted dying, in an often emotional debate putting the question back on the agenda, if not on the statute books.

Nearly 130 peers made speeches during a marathon discussion of the Assisted Dying Bill, which would allow terminally-ill patients deemed mentally capable and likely to die within six months to be helped to end their own life.

The [bill](#) has been proposed by an individual member of the Lords and is not sponsored by the government, so it has very little likelihood of being approved.

But the debate emphasised the depth of feeling over the issue, just weeks after the Supreme Court urged parliament to look at whether the current ban on assisted dying might be incompatible with human rights legislation.

Among the supporters of the bill are former archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, who once backed the official Church of England position against assisted dying but recently changed his mind.

During Friday's debate, Carey said the proposals were "quite compatible" with his Christian beliefs.

"When suffering is so great, when patients know they are at the end of life, make repeated pleas to die, it seems a denial of loving compassion which is the hallmark of Christianity to refuse to allow them to fulfil their own clearly stated request—after clearly a proper process of safeguards have been observed," he said.

But many peers spoke against the bill, warning that it could lead to terminally ill or disabled people feeling they have a "duty to die" to ease the burden on loved ones.

Paralympic gold medallist Tanni Grey-Thompson said: "There is a myth that our lives are so tragic or painful that we must want to end it. And just this week I was told 'you must have wanted to kill yourself many times in your life'. No, I haven't."

Last month, campaigners lost a bid to overturn the ban on assisted dying on the grounds that it was incompatible with the right to respect for private and family life enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

However, the judges at the Supreme Court said parliament should consider the issue.

Surveys suggest as many as 80 percent of the public support legalising [assisted dying](#) in some form.

Prime Minister David Cameron is not among them. This week he spoke of his "worry" about legalising euthanasia, and said he was "not convinced that further steps need to be taken".

The bill will now progress to the next stages of discussion but regardless of any opposition, it is unlikely to clear both the Lords and the elected House of Commons before the end of the parliamentary session next

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