

Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill - Briefing on Stage 1 Debate and Vote

14th May 2025

Summary

The Stage 1 vote - on whether the Parliament supports the general principles of the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill - was held on Tuesday 13th May.

The Parliament voted in favour of the Bill. This means that the Bill will now progress to Stage 2 of the parliamentary process, where amendments will be considered. The Bill would need to pass a further (Stage 3) vote in order to become law.

Hospice UK has a dedicated (private) page that keeps members updated on the progress of assisted dying legislation across the UK. This includes all previous briefings provided on this Bill, and webinar recordings: [Assisted dying: information for members | Hospice UK](#)

Debate

A significant number of MSPs (44) made substantive contributions to [the debate](#). Of those, over half spoke about palliative care and supported the need for more investment in/focus on palliative care.

The debate was partly shaped by the Health Committee's scrutiny report - for example, there was a lot of focus on the balance between individual autonomy and the protection of vulnerable groups. Some contributions were a very straightforward, setting out why MSPs were making their decision to vote for or against the Bill; other contributions were much stronger/more personally driven.

A substantial number of those who voted in favour made it clear that they were voting for the Bill at this point so the issue could be explored further by the Parliament but reserved the right to change their mind and vote against the Bill at Stage 3. And many MSPs highlighted the need for amendments to be made to the Bill. Most of those who spoke (both for and against the Bill) complimented Liam McArthur on the approach he has taken and welcomed the overall tone of the debate.

References to Palliative Care and Hospices

Many MSPs made detailed remarks relating to palliative care - many welcoming the work of hospices. Those who spoke in more detail also highlighted existing inequity of access - for example as a result of financial hardship or due to living in a remote or rural area. Several MSPs in favour of the Bill referenced palliative care as not being an "either/or" to assisted dying - that both should be available.

Eight MSPs specifically referenced the need for improved funding for hospices, some also mentioned that the £5m funding announced in the Budget has not yet been allocated. A small number of individual hospice organisations (including Hospice UK) were referenced by MSPs during the debate.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health said in his contribution *"it is important to restate the Government's commitment to ensuring that everyone who needs it can access well co-ordinated, timely and high-quality palliative care and care around dying"* and also said the palliative care strategy and delivery plan will be published this summer. The Cabinet Secretary also recognised hospice staff as key to

delivery of palliative care: *"I take this opportunity to put on record my gratitude to the NHS staff, hospice staff, community and social care staff and general practice staff who provide palliative care services across Scotland"*.

Miles Briggs MSP stated that he intended to put forward an amendment to introduce a legal right to palliative care. A number of other MSPs indicated that they support his work on a right to palliative care.

Voting

This vote was a matter of conscience and therefore every MSP had a free vote and was not bound by a party position. The [full voting results](#) are available on the Scottish Parliament website. Most parties split into both for/against. The Greens were the exception to this as their 2021 manifesto included a commitment to support assisted dying - although reservations about this specific Bill were still raised by Green MSPs in the debate.

The breakdown of votes was:

For - 70

Against - 56

Abstention - 1 (Cabinet Secretary for Health)

Other Activity

With the exception of the Cabinet Secretary for Health, no member of the Scottish Government requested to speak in the debate. However, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister did set out their views (against) ahead of the vote. Their statements included the following comments:

- First Minister - *But what I take from that is that I as First Minister have an obligation to ensure people are supported during end of life care to the greatest extent possible in order to alleviate that suffering ... Whether this legislation ultimately passes or not, that is an obligation I take incredibly seriously and it's a matter my government will take forward in what ever circumstances we face.*
- Deputy First Minister - *It is right and proper to challenge ourselves as to what more we can do as the Government to ensure that palliative care is resourced sufficiently, with access to the best support, latest research and appropriate interventions to relieve suffering. Recognising the inherent dignity of every life means that irrespective of a terminal diagnosis or how much longer somebody has, they are worthy of the finest, best and most loving care*

What Happens Next

Parliamentary Process

The Bill now moves to the Stage 2 of the [parliamentary process](#) for a bill. This will involve the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee considering and voting on amendments - which can be put forward by any MSP. MSPs have indicated to us that they expect a substantial number of amendments to be put forward in relation to this Bill, and Liam McArthur has already indicated he intends to increase the minimum age from 16 to 18. Once all amendments have been voted on at Stage 2, an updated version of the Bill is then published.

The Cabinet Secretary [wrote to the Health Committee](#) ahead of the vote and committed to providing further information if the Bill passed the vote: *"I read the Committee's Stage 1 report with interest and note its findings, particularly those that pertain to the Scottish Government. If the Bill passes the Stage 1 vote, I will write again in advance of Stage 2 proceedings to provide a full Government response to the points raised."*

Following the Stage 2 process, the Bill comes back to the full parliament for any further amendments and a final vote at Stage 3. This Bill has sections within it (relating to regulation of medical staff and control of drugs) that are reserved matters. Liam McArthur's view set out in the policy memorandum that accompanied the Bill is that this can be addressed through a variety of routes, such as an order under the Scotland Act. The Scottish Government view is that the Bill is not currently within the competence of the Scottish Parliament and confirms that further processes/engagement with the UK Government would be required. Resolving those issues, as well as the many broader concerns MSPs have raised, in time to hold the third stage vote on this Bill before next year's election may prove challenging. If the third stage vote on the Bill is not held by March 2026 then it will fall and the process would need to start again after the election.

Hospice UK actions

We will seek to use the debate around the assisted dying bill to highlight our key asks on investment in palliative care, and the delivery of sustainable funding for hospice care. Particularly as we move towards the 2026 election, we will co-ordinate actions and key asks across a number of policy areas. We will follow-up with MSPs who have made positive statements about palliative care to look for opportunities to help progress outstanding issues, including sustainable funding for hospices.

As the Bill moves forward, there are a number of areas where we would like to see amendments made. We will engage with MSPs to try and get those amendments put forward during the Stage 2 process. We'll continue to provide updates to members as the Bill progresses, and support hospices as they consider the implications of this proposed legislation progressing.

Further Information

Our response to the vote is publicly available: [Hospice UK responds to vote on Assisted Dying in Scotland | Hospice UK](#)

Our private page for hospice members provides information on activity happening across the UK in relation to assisted dying: [Assisted dying: information for members | Hospice UK](#)

If you have any further queries please email policyscotland@hospiceuk.org