

NEWS FOCUS

or a dangerous step?

The proposition followed a citizens' jury report, which showed that 78% of jury members supported assisted dying for adults living with a terminal illness or unbearable suffering, subject to safeguards.

Deputy Guida accepted an amendment lodged by St Lawrence Deputy Kirsten Morel early on in the debate, adding an extra stage to the process, which was welcomed by many States Members during the sitting.

In his amendment, Deputy Morel said he wanted further detail on the process and safeguards to be considered in a follow-up debate.

Public figures who spoke out ahead of the vote included former Chief Minister Terry Le Sueur, who was against the move due to safeguarding concerns, and Paul Gazzard – the widower of Alain du Chemin, who died of an aggressive form of brain cancer,

who wrote to States Members to say that despite being very grateful for the care provided to his husband by Jersey Hospice, the couple would have appreciated an alternative option.

Addressing States Members yesterday, Deputy Guida described the topic as a 'very controversial issue', with many parishioners contacting their elected representatives 'agitating for one side or the other'. The minister encouraged the politicians present to 'act according to their own conviction'.

Deputy Renouf said there was 'a great sadness to me', arguing that the proposal 'accepts that vulnerable people will be put at risk by its introduction and accepts that safeguards have limitations and will not always work'. He added that it meant 'accepting bringing about early death of some people who need our protection. At present

those people have our protection'.

The minister raised concerns that individuals could consider themselves a 'burden to their families', and questioned whether the safeguards were sufficient enough. 'The prohibition of killing is the safeguard,' he said.

Deputy Renouf also said that assisted dying 'starts calculating and determining a value to human life which leads to an inevitable change to attitude', adding that society risked becoming 'desensitised to the value of life'.

His view was echoed by the Dean of Jersey, the Very Rev Mike Keirle, who said the States was 'in danger of writing a blank ethical cheque'.

Mr Keirle, who is allowed to speak in the States but does not have a vote, added that 'whatever happens, it's critical those safeguards are protected and ring-fenced'.

He questioned the need for legislation,

saying that 'the crucial question to my mind is should there be legislation and what impact will that have' and said that if the Assembly made the wrong decision there would be 'no putting the genie back in the bottle'.

He also called assisted dying the 'single most important ethical issue that we will face in a generation', raising concerns that the change could erode trust between doctors and their patients.

Senator Sam Mézec said Members needed to consider the issue 'extremely carefully and consider what the effect of the decision we will make today will have on people in the future, and how that sits on our consciences one way or another'.

The Senator said denying choice to people who were suffering was 'fundamentally wrong'.

Debate was adjourned for an expected vote today.

■ **Home Affairs Minister Gregory Guida** introduced the proposition to legalise assisted dying on behalf of the Council of Ministers. He told the Chamber: 'This is a current societal issue being discussed and debated worldwide and Jersey should not ignore it'

Picture: ROB CURRIE (32120443)



What you said online...

■ **Care for Life Jersey**, a campaign group opposing assisted dying (@CareforLife-JE):

'Dean Keirle puts forward the important context of palliative care, which we can improve and which #euthanasia & #assistedsuicide undermine'

■ **Gary Burgess** (@GaryBurgessCI):

'Oh dear. We're sadly drifting into what I'd define as scaremongering from both the current Health Minister Richard Renouf and one-time wannabe Health Minister Sarah Ferguson. She said: "Assisted dying is the worst nightmare from science fiction. I say no."

■ **Binky** (@TheOnlyGuru):

'We #jerseyci are only step one away from getting the right to #AssistedDying. I'm touched by some of the personal experiences I've heard today. I hope that the Citizen's Panel findings aren't going to be ignored.'

■ **Dr Tim Howard** (@DrTimGHoward):

'The States of Jersey are debating assisted dying today, following the public referendum that gave overwhelming support for allowing it. As New Zealand, that most rational of countries, now allows choice at the end of life, when will the rest of the UK follow?'

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