

# MPs will be given free vote on legalising right to die in Britain

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MPs will get a free vote on a bill to legalise assisted dying this September in a move that will be the first serious Commons attempt to change the law.

The Labour MP Rob Marris, who won a private members' bill last week, said that he would introduce the same legislation that made progress in the House of Lords before the general election.

Drawn up by Lord Falconer of Thoroton, the bill would allow doctors to prescribe lethal doses of medication to anyone with only six months to live who showed a "clear and settled intention" to end their life.

Mr Marris, the MP for Wolverhampton South West, said that people who

were suffering and facing imminent death should not be denied medical help to end their lives.

A spokeswoman for David Cameron said that the government would not give the bill any extra time but MPs would be given a free vote.

The prime minister will not support the move, nor give it government backing. Mr Cameron "wasn't convinced" of the case for the bill, and feared that legalisation "could push people towards doing things they didn't want to do", the spokeswoman said.

The bill's second reading will take place on September 11, when a vote will be held. MPs last debated the issue in 2012, when many spoke movingly on both sides of the debate. However, they last voted on the issue in 1997, when public support was untested. It is now

widely accepted that about 80 per cent of the public want to see a change in the law along the lines proposed.

They have been moved in part by stories of British people going to court to win the right to die, and of those travelling to the Dignitas clinic in Zurich, the only option they have under current law. Anyone helping someone to die in Britain faces a prison sentence of up to 14 years, although no one who has helped a relative to travel to Dignitas has been prosecuted.

Jeffrey Spector, 54, who died last month, posing for pictures of his "last supper" with family and friends before making the journey to Dignitas. He had an inoperable tumour on his spine that would have led to paralysis.

Mr Marris said: "It is a choice that I would want for myself and I do not

think we should be denying this to people who are facing imminent death. The House of Commons has not voted on this for almost 20 years.

"While the prospects of getting the law changed are difficult without official government support, this is an opportunity to show that we in parliament are not ducking our responsibility to the public and I look forward to continuing the case for a compassionate assisted dying law."

The Supreme Court has ordered parliament to give the legislation proper consideration or risk being overruled. In a landmark ruling last year, nine Supreme Court judges said that they potentially had the power to declare a 50-year-old law criminalising acts that help someone to take their own life to be "incompatible" with human rights.