

60 REASONS TO SUPPORT NEW YORK'S MEDICAL AID IN DYING ACT

Karin Johnson

Rockville Centre, New York



Reason #56

Because the decision about how to spend their last hours on this earth should belong to the person who is dying.

The way we live the last of our days, and the way that we die, these decisions should be made by New Yorkers themselves. Instead, the power to decide how we die lies in the hands of people who have probably never met us, don't know us, don't live with us, don't love us, and won't think about us after we are gone. New York state legislators can change that by giving terminally ill people the autonomy and the dignity of dying on their own terms.

I was a sister-in-law to a beautiful, terminally ill 61-year old woman who had intractable pain while in the care of a very good and dedicated hospice team. She died without her husband and her most beloved sister by her side. If she had access to medical aid in dying, she would have been spared both the emotional and physical pain of her last months and been surrounded by those she chose. She could have been lucid and she could have felt peace. But other people decided that she couldn't have that. Others, who never met her, didn't know her, didn't live with her, didn't love her, and aren't thinking of her now.

I am the daughter of a wonderful 81-year old woman who has been diagnosed with multiple myeloma. Like many elderly people with terminal illnesses, she doesn't want to die, but she is not afraid of death. She is afraid of dying. She is afraid of dying badly. To her, that means dying alone, dying in a facility, and/or dying in pain. She has been given a diagnosis that has infused her life with a fear and anxiety that healthy people truly can't imagine. Daily she works to try to keep her illness at bay.

When there is nothing left that she can do, and death is imminent, my mother should be given the respect of autonomy in deciding what her last weeks and days will be like. She should have the ability to die with those of her choosing around her. She should be able to relax, knowing that she will not suffer if her pain begins to exceed her ability to cope with it. She deserves the respect to die on her own terms. But right now, other people have decided whether she can have that. Others, who never met her, don't know her, don't live with her, don't love her, and will not think of her after she is gone.

The dying process can be lucid, peaceful, humane, merciful, and yes, beautiful when patients have control of that process. We have the medical means to stave off the dying process regardless of the suffering and harm that causes and we use it with abandon. We also have the medical means to allow someone a gentle death that respects their wishes and autonomy and New Yorkers deserve this option. Only they know how their last hours on this earth should be. Only they should decide.

To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh at acavanaugh@compassionandchoices.org.

 **compassion
& choices**