

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



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Reason #58

Because Black New Yorkers should have the power to determine what kind of care they want at the end of life.

I've seen up close what cancer does to people, particularly bone cancer, and the suffering they endure. You see, I've volunteered at Isaiah House, a hospice facility here in Rochester and as a patient care tech on the oncology floor at Highland hospital. I've also worked at Hope Lodge as a coordinator dealing with cancer patients.

I've listened to people beg for relief from pain and suffering. There are some people who have been on pain medications for so long, even ever-increasing doses of morphine don't provide relief. Then there are those who are on such high doses of pain medication, they can no longer communicate.

The importance of planning for the care that I want at the end of my life became clear to me when I went to the hospital for the first time ever in 2019 with a tumor in my right kidney. Thankfully, we learned that it was benign. It was the worst time in my life, but it was a wake-up call. It made me change my whole way of thinking. I thought about the cancer patients I worked with and how they maintain joy. I asked myself: "What do you do with this now? What are you going to change?"

So I became an advocate for folks in my community getting the care they need to stay alive. I encourage women in my community to get timely mammograms, and men to get prostate screenings. For myself, I don't play around, because I want to be around . . . for my kids, but also for myself.

I also made a promise to myself that I would write out my wishes for my daughter -- a kind of gift I could give her -- to let her know what kind of care I want should I be unable to speak for myself.

It might be surprising to hear, but I want every kind of care and treatment until there's nothing left. I want everything that our modern medical system has to offer.

But I also think it's important that we have options at the end of life. We all, inevitably, die one day. We need to have that base covered as well. We have options throughout our lives, and it's important to have options at the end of life too.

I get frustrated when I hear people say that folks in the Black community don't support the option of medical aid in dying, or we won't talk about end-of-life issues. That's wrong. We need to live, but we also have to prepare for the end. And we need to have the power to determine how we go.

Expanding end-of-life care options to include medical aid in dying would most definitely benefit our community. Black families shouldn't have to suffer or see their loved ones die in pain.

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

