

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

## Bernadette Hoppe

A Buffalo-based attorney, Bernadette Hoppe (1965-2019) urged New York lawmakers to authorize medical aid in dying while facing terminal cancers.



### Reason #3

**So that no one's final weeks are spent worrying about possible uncontrollable suffering at life's end.**

*The following is an unpublished op-ed drafted by Bernadette Hoppe in the weeks before her death. She died on March 1, 2019.*

**A**pril 15, 2014, was the day that changed my world forever.

On that fateful day, I was diagnosed with anal cancer, a relatively rare type of cancer that changes the lives of approximately 7,200 Americans — and their families — every year.

Since then, I have suffered through three rounds of chemotherapy, two rounds of radiation treatments and one lymph node dissection, which, as bad luck would have it, turned into a massive wound infection. I have fought this insidious disease with every fiber of my being for the last 4+ years.

Despite experiencing renal failure, which leaves me with tubes hanging out of my back, and contracting hepatitis, I truly thought I was on the road to recovery. I kept thinking that I was going to settle into a new normal and go back to my real life.

Then, on July 30, 2017, my world went from bad to worse when I received a terminal diagnosis.

I found out that my cancer had reached stage 4, which meant that it had spread to other organs in my body. I learned that treatment was no longer an option and that a cure was nothing more than a pipedream. All that medical science can do now is mitigate my symptoms.

I am 53 years old. I am too young to die. I don't want to die. There is still so much I want to do.

I want to live and spend as much time as possible with my sweet, loving, kind, and patient wife, Mary. I want to share experiences with my nieces and nephew and cousins who are just starting out on careers and creating families. I want to be a part of that — to bask in the glow of their successes — and cheer them on after the inevitable failures.

Yet, I know I am dying — sooner — rather than later. Even harder than living with cancer is the thought of dying a painful death from cancer.

I am lucky to live in Buffalo, home to Roswell Park Cancer Institute. I receive superb care and have an excellent palliative care team. Their goal is to keep me free from pain. Having gone through several very painful regimens already, I know that not all pain can be managed.

I'm a New Yorker, and unlike terminally ill adults in seven other states, I don't have the option of medical aid in dying to peacefully end my suffering, if it becomes unbearable. I really want that option.

I believe with all my heart that getting a prescription for medical aid in dying would provide a kind of inner peace for me and my family. It doesn't mean that I'm going to take the medication. I just want to have that option to ensure I can die peacefully at home in the arms of my loved ones. It would help me feel like I have a little bit more say-so over an impossible situation.

We plan for births, even though it's going to happen when it's going to happen. So why can't we do that for this last piece of our lives?

It is time to allow dying people to make very private, very personal and very difficult decisions about when and how we die.

I fear that it is too late for me. I will likely not live long enough to see New York enact the Medical Aid in Dying Act. But I hope and pray that the Legislature and Governor Cuomo will authorize medical aid in dying in New York. If not for me then for those who sadly, but inevitably, will follow me.



**To join our mission, email Amanda Cavanaugh  
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