

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

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Reason #21

So that when you know your time in this world will be cut short, you can live your life with less fear and more joy.

I'm a proud native of Rochester, NY. I love this city and New York State. I have lived here all my life, married, raised a family, worked and retired here. I've lived a good life in Rochester, and I hope to die a good death here, in the place I love - surrounded by loved ones, comfortable and free of pain, having made the choice for myself that my illness has progressed to the point where it's time to leave this earth.

Although I worked in the healthcare field, I had never heard of Chronic Myelomonocytic Leukemia until my earthshaking diagnosis in March of 2019. I was stunned when the hematologist delivered the results of my recent bone marrow biopsy: "You have CMML. There is no cure. The median survival is 54 months."

CMML is a rare blood cancer in which malignant cells in the bone marrow proliferate, and the bone marrow is unable to make "good" blood cells such as red cells and platelets. The course of the disease is individual and unpredictable. I've had hospitalizations, IV antibiotics, blood transfusions and "packing" for a nosebleed that wouldn't stop.

To look at me today, you probably wouldn't guess I have a cancer with a terminal diagnosis. I'm doing relatively well now on a regimen of weekly chemotherapy and medications to manage symptoms. But I'm already more than a year out from my diagnosis, and from what's

known about CMML, there's a good likelihood the disease will, at some point, convert to an acute leukemia, or the chemo will stop working. No one knows what Fate has in store for us, but I do know I'm on a shortcut to the end of my life.

I've done a lot of thinking about life and death throughout my life and career. Having cancer has focused my thoughts more keenly on what I want the rest of my life - and my inevitable death - to look like. I want to live every day in gratitude for the people I've known and experiences I've had, and I want to live life as fully as I'm able to do - without the fear of a prolonged and excruciating death hanging over me.

If you've ever put down a beloved pet that was gravely ill or suffering, you know you made that difficult decision out of love for the animal. Yet we, as citizens of New York State - otherwise one of the most forward-looking states in the nation - are not allowed to make that decision for ourselves when we are terminally ill and nearing death, when we would welcome the choice of a peaceful and dignified end to our suffering. It would be so comforting to me to have the option of Medical Aid in Dying so that I, my friends and fellow New Yorkers could embrace life with less fear and more joy.

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

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