

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

Debbie Stern

A supporter living with terminal cancers
myelodysplastic syndrome and myeloproliferative
neoplasm disorder, a type of leukemia



Williamsville, New York



Reason #48

Because knowing I have the option of a peaceful death when all else fails will improve the quality of the time I have left.

I have lived in Buffalo, New York my whole life and I'm hoping state lawmakers pass a medical aid-in-dying bill quickly. I don't have a lot of time for politics. I need this to happen now, and I'm not alone. There are many suffering, terminally ill New Yorkers. We need a sense of relief and an increased quality of life at the end of our lives this option could provide us.

I have been sick for a little over ten years. In the first few years, I traveled everywhere, trying to find out what was wrong with me. I have two very rare diagnoses. Finally, in 2017, I was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome and myeloproliferative neoplasm disorder, a type of leukemia, and I was told that the median life span was about five years. I was also told, at that time, that I had five, very high risk, mutations and that didn't bode well for my prognosis.

In March 2019, I acquired another mutation and I started to get sicker. In June, I was put on a chemo medication given subcutaneously in the stomach, which I am still on. I was told I would either be on chemo for the rest of my life or the only chance of cure is a bone marrow transplant. Unfortunately, there have been two worldwide searches and there is no compatible donor for me.

I thank God that, at least for now, the chemo is working. There are some troubling side effects and it does limit me from planning further out than two days because there are days when I can't do much at all. For now, the benefits of chemo have outweighed the side effects.

I'm a mom, I'm a wife, and I have wonderful friends. I want very much to live as long as I can and to be there for my family and friends, and to enjoy my life as long as I can.

I am a person of deep spirituality and I have a strong relationship with God, and I don't believe my God wants people to suffer. Medical aid in dying becoming available in my home state would provide me a tremendous sense of empowerment and peace of mind. Knowing I have an option would enable me to live the rest of my life with a much better quality of life, taking the worry of increased suffering off the table for me.

In the past, I have had a great deal of fear about death and dying, but as my disease has progressed, I have come to have less fear about dying itself. The fear now is more about suffering at the end and about my family and loved ones having to witness that. I watched my father die a prolonged death from cancer and it was extremely traumatizing. I don't want the people close to me to see me go through the same. I don't want it to happen like that.

I spoke to a friend recently, who is also one of my doctors, and she, interestingly, is a devout Catholic, but said to me, "I don't agree with everything that the church says and I support you in this," and that meant a lot to me.

I think some people don't understand that medical aid in dying is optional. I have friends who would never want this option, and that's ok. It's a very personal decision. I would implore lawmakers, however, to consider the rights of people who are in the situation. I have a progressive, terminal cancer. I hope to be allowed to make my own decision. It impacts my quality of life moving forward, knowing I have the option of a peaceful death, when all else fails.

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