

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

Raymond D. Smith, Jr.



Reason #57

Because each year you fail to act, people without the compassionate option of medical aid in dying will suffer needlessly.

In December 2017, my wife Anne Allbright Smith was diagnosed with corticobasal syndrome (CBS), a relatively rare neurodegenerative disease. It leaves mental faculties largely intact but steadily and relentlessly strips muscles of their ability to function. CBS has no treatment, no medications, no cure and is ultimately fatal.

With her dogs, Anne had always been an active outdoor person in robust good health, inquisitive about everything natural. When she could no longer do enough of the things that gave her life meaning, she wanted out. She spent much time thinking about her end-of-life options and discussing them with me, her family, and those she held dear. We are part of a community of seniors that has advocated for expanding end-of-life options in New York, and we strongly support New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act. We knew that the legislature had failed to act to pass this compassionate bill, and she knew that this was not an option for her.

The two dogs in the picture, Anzac and Diggy, had quick and painless deaths, but Anne did not.

On November 7, 2020, with her family's sad but full support Anne succeeded in ending her suffering using what is known as VSED, or voluntarily stopping eating and drinking, the only legal option available to her. We had all expected it to be a peaceful death. It was in fact a brutally medieval eleven-day ordeal, despite the best in medical, hospice and pain relief care. Anne was never comfortable or pain-free during those eleven long days.

I would prefer to die in my sleep. Failing that, when life has lost its meaning for me, I would hope to have access to medical aid in dying. For me, the option of medical aid in dying would be a choice easily arrived at and greatly reinforced by watching Anne's horrendous ordeal with VSED.

New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act is a carefully drafted bill. It would allow those terminally ill adults who qualify, based on strict criteria, this compassionate option. It's an option, not a mandate imposed on anyone.

Skeptics who watch a death such as Anne's become believers. A couple of years ago, one state legislator observed of his colleagues, "Everyone is one bad death away from supporting [medical aid in dying]."

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

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