

Testimony in Support of H.B. 7015: An Act Concerning Aid in Dying For Terminally Ill Patients
Heidi Fortier
Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Heidi Fortier and I am testifying on behalf of H.B. 7015.

My father, Daniel Gonzalez, was diagnosed in February 2013 with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as ALS, or Lou Gehrig's Disease, at 56 years old. Unfortunately, ten months later, my father passed away.

Before February 2013, my father was an active, healthy 56 year old living a completely normal self-sufficient life. Within the first 2 months, my dad went from walking, to a cane, to a walker, and finally to a wheelchair. My dad lost all muscle movement in his upper and lower body, including all extremities. The ability to do all daily tasks, from showering himself, toileting and feeding himself were stripped from him in a matter of months.

My dad's one fear and concern was for me, as his only child, was him being a burden on me and my mother. For me having to see my father deteriorate was his greatest fear.

I remember when my dad was first diagnosed with ALS, he told me he wishes it were cancer, because cancer at least has a treatment and sometimes a cure. ALS at this time has no cure, and there is currently only one medication that can help prolong life 2-4 months at most.

After quitting my job to help care for my dad 24/7, I had the opportunity to speak with him about wishes he had for the future. My dad knew the end was coming, and that scared him. The reality of ALS, is that you will slowly pass away, as you completely lose the ability to swallow, and eventually breathe.

After all the palliative care my dad could have had was done, the next step was hospice care. If this bill were available, my dad would have willingly accepted it at this time. My father was on hospice care 2 weeks, having morphine up to every fifteen minutes. The hospice nurse later told us that a lot of the time morphine does not even help patients suffering that much. How is that any way to die? To be in so much pain and so uncomfortable that you can't wait for your life to end? Or should people be able to pass away on their own terms, comfortable and aware of what is going on around them.

I wish I could say I knew without a doubt, that my dad was even aware that his wife, daughter, son in law & sister were standing by his side when he passed away. The amount of morphine my dad had to keep him comfortable while he passed away was great.

Having this bill passed will mean that individuals with a terminal illness will not have to suffer the way my dad had to. I urge you to pass this bill, and help those suffering end their life with dignity and as pain free as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Heidi Fortier