

State of Connecticut Public Hearing

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

**Testimony of
Kira Philips, M.Ed.**

Dear State of Connecticut Public Health Committee,

I am writing to you today to share my personal story. In dedication to my beloved mom, I am making it my life's mission to advocate for the passing of An Act Concerning Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients (S.B. 88).

In June 2021, my mom Clare Marie Philips, ended her life after a long, three year battle with Multiple Myeloma (bone marrow cancer). The fact that my mom chose to take her prognosis into her own hands and end her life is not what upsets me. What does upset me is that she was suffering. She was on a regime of about 15 medications, which was a challenge for her as she always had difficulty swallowing pills, and she also was doing a weekly chemo treatment via intravenous infusion. Towards the end her mobility was impaired to the point where she had to walk with a cane and crawl up the stairs of our house. My mom, like many people, did not want to lose her hair. She had developed a golf-ball sized protruding tumor of myeloma cells on her scalp that would have had to be surgically removed leaving a large bald spot. Removing the tumor would primarily be cosmetic because the cancer was already pervasive, but the idea of this surgery terrified my mom who had already transformed from a beautiful, healthy woman to a hunched over, frail, shell of her former self. My mom was especially self conscious about her posture, and because Multiple Myeloma attacks the spine, she went from being 5'5" tall to 4'11" – that is just one of the ways the cancer ravaged her physical body. Cancer also ravaged her mental health, which is something I was fully aware of until it was too late. My mom, being the compassionate and strong person she was, did not let on to anyone how much radiating spinal, back, and bone pain she was actually in, and it wasn't until her passing that we all realized. Only someone truly desperate would do what she did.

On the morning of June 3rd my mom shot herself in the head in the shed in our backyard. The trauma my dad lives with now, being the one that had to find her, has ruined him. They had been married for over 40 years, and throughout my mom's diagnosis my dad had been her primary caregiver. To have to find your wife like that is an unspeakably awful thing to have to live with now, and it all could have been avoided if the Medical Aid in Dying had been available to my mom. She wrote in her suicide letter that she wished she could have moved to Vermont for six months just to be able to utilize it. Losing my mom to cancer is one thing, losing my mom to suicide is another, but losing my mom to gun violence is still unfathomable to me at times. This is because my mom was the most caring, kind, gentle, level headed person I've ever met. She and my dad went to China to adopt me when I was four months old, and they raised me vegetarian and taught me to have compassion for all beings. She was an advocate for human rights and donated annually to humanitarian and animal rescue nonprofits. She was the best mom to me in every regard. I cannot be more thankful to have been raised by her, and I owe her my entire life and who I am. That is why the idea of my mom shooting herself is insane. Since Sandy Hook I have been an advocate for gun control, so I did not necessarily support her decision to get a gun permit in 2020. However, my dad and I both did not think anything of it other than she wanted it purely for protection since we live in Hartford and there was a lot of uneasiness and political unrest that summer. Never in a million years did we think she was getting a gun to be able to have it on hand with the intention to use it to end her life. The statistics on women and suicide by gunshot is significantly lower than it is for men (approximately 21000 men to 3000 women), due to the violent nature of guns. This proves her desperation, she wanted something that would work, that was quick and painless, even if it meant having to do it in complete secrecy and isolation. The fact that she lived with that idea alone for however many months, is one of the saddest things about the situation to me.

Some people are true fighters when it comes to life altering diagnosis, they will live with nausea and vomiting, they will stay on the intubator, they will eat and drink through a tube in their abdomen. Other people, including my mom, do not want any of this. She fought cancer for three years, she tried a round of radiation, she was a fighter, but I think she was also at peace with being the keeper of her prognosis. You would never tell someone who wanted to fight that they can't, that they should just give up. So why would you tell someone who wants to be free from suffering that they can't. I think one of the reasons why my mom ended her life when she did was because she did not want me to have to see her suffering even more. To see someone you love bedridden, and incontinent, and wasting away is extremely painful and

emotionally taxing. We had already seen her in that state when she went into hospice in 2018, before she regained enough strength to start a new treatment and was in remission for a year. My mom did what she did because in a way, that's how selfless she was. She was sparing me and my dad the despair of having to relive hospice and see what end-of-life for a cancer patient often looks like.

This bill has nothing to do with people with disabilities or the Hippocratic Oath. It has to do with having compassion for people who are suffering— suffering in a way that we might not ever experience or can comprehend, if we're lucky. I do not want any other family to have to go through what we have been through, that is why I am writing this and speaking out on this issue even though it is incredibly difficult, personal, and painful to do so. It is an issue that, until you are personally touched by it, it wouldn't even be something you think about, but to have the *option* is what I am imploring you to give. Give people the legal option. No one has to do it, no one is forcing anyone to do it, no doctors would sign off on it unless it has been evaluated, no one can co-sign for another person. But give someone who is terminally ill, who may live every waking moment in chronic pain, sickness, and fear, the option so that they can be freed from suffering surrounded by their loved ones in a comfy bed— not alone, outside on the concrete floor of a dark shed. I truly believe that no matter your political standing, religious beliefs, or human positionality, if you lived what my mom went through, what I have gone through, what my dad is going through, you would be in support of this bill. Empathy will carry us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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