

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Jill Hammerberg and I am providing testimony in support of SB 1076, Medical Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Adults. First of all, I would very much like to express my gratitude to you for listening to and considering WHY this legislation is important to so many.

My personal story begins with a broken promise to my husband of nearly 40 years. Our hero lived out the progression of prostate cancer for over 17 years, enduring surgeries along with both traditional and experimental treatments. The most remarkable part of this time was that he never let it show. His outrageous sense of humor, work ethic and love of his business, community and family dominated his daily life – there was no room for fear. His rascalion nature coupled with his big heart made him an irresistible force to reckon with in both work and play which were uniquely intertwined.

But the disease finally became a reality as his doctors shared the last MRIs with us a week before Christmas 2011. No longer could he deny the inevitable cancer cells' migration to his bones and liver which had formed massive tumors. My 3 sons and I received this news together with an odd calmness as our hero seemed at peace. He was given pain medication, a blood transfusion and sent home with generous Hospice care. I reached for his hand and promised with a wry smile that at last he could relax. The accelerating pain he had been experiencing would finally be lessened.

For the next 6 weeks, we welcomed family and close friends for conversation, stories, laughs, tears, music, favorite movies, celebrating 'ordinary' time that was anything but. It was a magic time in our lives, suspended and set apart from all else. When asked what his last wishes were, Mark replied, "Just this. Hanging with you guys and our pups; Jill making bread and soup, boys taking me for rides in the jeep around my town . . ." Here is a 59 year old man who was reconciled with his diagnosis; he had no regrets in his big life and was ready to die in peace.

Our good friend and hospice nurse, Ruth, checked in with us as usual on what would be his last day. The vitals indicated that he would begin 'breaking down' any time. Keep a pile of dark towels by the bed, prepare for bleeding to begin, were her gentle yet firm warnings.

That same night, our hero woke up in excruciating pain. The unearthly sounds are with me every day. He became a drowning victim, fighting for each breath. The powerful medication given to me to administer when such time came provided no comfort for a seeming eternity. Holding him close, trying to absorb some of the agony, I whispered, "I'm sorry I broke my promise. I thought it would be enough."

If my husband had had the prescription waiting on our bedside table, he would no doubt have used it on that last sunny day when we were together with our sons. We would have had the opportunity to say, "I love you" one last time with a Guinness toast. Instead, we carry the individual as well as the collective trauma of the indignity of his pain forever etched in our hearts.

So now I ask you to support SB1076, the bill that would authorize Medical Aid in Dying for terminally ill adults. If passed, with its additional safeguards in place, the choice would offer comfort on many levels for all involved. Please support the elimination of unnecessary, prolonged suffering for our loved ones. Going forward, give families THE CHOICE to make together.

Very Sincerely,

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