

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

Karis Wiggins

Karis carries on the legacy of her father, Jim Wiggins, who advocated for medical aid in dying while facing several cancer diagnoses.

Syracuse, New York



Reason #59

Because families benefit when dying people can chart their own end-of-life journey.

My dad, Jim Wiggins, passed on February 20, 2017. He had developed a form of renal cancer that had migrated to the lymph nodes in his chest and was growing at an aggressive rate.

I am always surprised at how few people want to talk about end-of-life decision making. My dad had been fighting cancer for a decade. We talked with him about what he wanted in his final days, whether those days would come in months or years. He knew suffering and he was not afraid of pain.

He was hopeful that he could die at home; he didn't want to die in the hospital. He didn't think suffering was a value, or that the God he believed in wanted people to suffer. He was crystal clear on this issue. And he was open about his support for medical aid in dying.

We worked to ensure that he had as much control and dignity as we could afford him in his final days of life.

In his final days, he was in hospice care in his home exactly where he hoped he would be. He also knew that hospice and medical aid in dying was not an either-or proposition but instead could work very well together. He wanted autonomy at the end of his life just as he had created throughout his life. I know that he would have had far greater peace of mind if he had the option and in knowing that he could spare his beloved family the pain of witnessing prolonged suffering.

Medical aid-in-dying bills are not based on broad-brush policy. Only a small number of terminally ill individuals in authorized states use the option. The boundaries provided in the legislation are so clear, it just makes sense to allow people to navigate their own end-of-life journeys when facing a terminal diagnosis.

I don't want a long painful death. I want as much choice as possible. I want to be able to discuss with my family about where I am—physically, geographically, and in my decision making—and to time things so that they could have time with me if they needed.

I began advocating for medical aid in dying after witnessing the death and suffering of people close to me. I feel like this is a calling for me. I feel a sense of duty to carry on my father's legacy of promoting conversations amongst people with different ideologies on all manner of subjects. Our sincere hope is that through conversation and legislative action we will create richer experiences for families and communities at large around this issue.

People deserve the right to have some control over their end-of-life experience. They deserve access to the full range of end-of-life care options, including medical aid in dying.

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

