I know that palliative care and hospice can help many. I also know that they are not interventions that suffice for all. Knowing that Oregon and Washington have not weakened their commitment to palliative care and hospice while implementing medical aid in dying reinforces the shift in my thinking that New York should permit those dying in our state all options.

This conversation has often been framed as whether individuals have a right to die. I think that is a very poor phrasing of the issue.

We all possess, like it or not, the right to die — the legislature’s actions have no bearing on this right. The question is, rather, when death arrives, how should we die, what will the manner of our dying be?

Some who are dying seek aggressive medical care. Some wish for hospice, emotional support and a caring, loving environment. Some choose neither.

Once death is certain they wish to control what happens to them including the time of their death and the degree of loss of dignity they endure. I see no reason to deny this decision to those who make it thoughtfully without coercion.

Physicians and our state can legitimately request protections against abuse, limits on who the state deems capable to make end-of-life decisions and permit refusal to participate in medical aid in dying. But, for those who are dying and who wish to die in a manner they believe best for them, permitting them to do so is not a matter of permitting death to be an answer to our individual woes.

It is the creation of a policy that respects how some, likely very few, of the dying who will choose to manage the inevitable. That is a moral option the state of New York should permit for the terminally ill.

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