

June 21, 2015

Jennifer Glass comments for Assembly Health Committee Hearing in Sacramento on July 7, 2015

Three summers ago, I got married, for the first time. My husband Harlan and my stepchildren, Tristan and Eloise, are here with me today.

We were just four months into our marriage when I was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer. We became a family under the shadow of life-threatening illness.

When I was diagnosed my cancer had already spread too far for surgery to be an option. I went through aggressive rounds of chemo, radiation, and then for two years I took a pill every day – a powerful oral chemotherapy – which caused punishing side effects but, for a time, kept my cancer contained.

The past few years have been unspeakably difficult. Still, even though I only felt well a few hours a day, I had a beautiful life that I could enjoy, and I found ways to live as fully as possible within the parameters of what my health allowed.

Things changed earlier this month, when we learned that my cancer has spread. I start chemo again tomorrow, in fact I delayed that start date only so that I could be here today.

This disease is notoriously aggressive. It is now in both of my lungs, as well as my liver and abdomen, my pelvis, my cervix. And I have a one inch tumor in my brain.

I feel this disease eating me alive. I fight for my life every day. Please don't make me fight for my death.

Since I got cancer, I have a new appreciation for firsts, and lasts.

I remember the first time I ran a race and came in first, panting as my strong, young lungs filled with air. I think about the last time I went for a hike with Harlan, and we had to stop so often so I could catch my breath. I'll never forget the first time a doctor said, "malignant," referring to the tumors growing inside me. And it's been years since the last time I had a headache, without thinking, I need to get a brain scan.

For two and a half years, I've been living with dying.

I'm at peace with the idea that my life will end, but how it might end, as my cancer runs its course, that terrifies me. There would be great comfort in knowing that I had another option, under the End-of-Life Option Act for California.

I've made my home in California because living here offers me so many options. Professionally, socially, recreationally, gastronomically – nowhere else provides its residents with so much individual choice. Each of us can craft the life best suited to our personal preferences, skills and beliefs. This is one of the primary reasons we have such extraordinary quality of life. But quality of life has to include end of life.

Endings matter, and I want the last word in how my story ends. The urgency for me is real and I need your help. Every Californian should have this option. At last.