

Dear Chair Sickles and Members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services,

I am writing today to offer my strong support for the passage of HB 858, the Medical Aid in Dying Act. I know you are very busy, so I will try and be brief.

We are all going to die. It is part of life, but how we die, and in what setting, is not so certain. Ten states and Washington, DC have passed some form of medical aid in dying legislation, ensuring 20 percent of Americans have control over end-of-life choices if they have a terminal disease. As someone in her 50s, in excellent health, the thought of my own death seems very far away, but after going through both my dad's battle with leukemia and my best friend's battle with small intestine cancer, I know having options available in the event of an incurable, terminal disease is very important and will give me, and my family, peace of mind.

I spent the last two days of my dad's life with him in the hospital, holding his hand as he gasped for breath from the pneumonia that was filling his lungs, making him unable to breathe. He was in horrible pain, suffering needlessly, when he should have had the option to be home with his family, on medications to ease his suffering, with the ability to terminate his life with the same level of dignity he had during his 78 years on earth. His death made me mad because it was such a terrible and disrespectful end to his amazing life. Sitting there holding his hand as he passed, I made a promise that I would do everything in my power to advocate for compassionate, humane options for terminally ill people.

The other reason I want this legislation to be enacted is my best friend Pam. We were inseparable since college, toured Europe together, raised our families, and talked all the time. When she got small intestine cancer at age 48, she fought like hell against the disease that only had a 20 percent survival rate for five years. She did chemo and radiation, changed her diet and lifestyle, and got another six years with her young daughter and husband. But then the cancer spread and there were no more options for treatment. She just slowly got thinner and weaker, unable to eat. She would have coughing fits (the cancer had spread to her lungs), unable to breathe, suffering horribly as her now 12-year-old daughter just watched her mom slowly die. We talked a lot about how she wished she had the option to end the pain and suffering, but medical aid in dying wasn't legal in her state. She eventually succumbed in 2019.

My experiences with my dad and best friend have shown me why we need to have an option in Virginia for medical aid in dying. There are strict limits on who can access this option (patients who only have six months to live and are of sound mind). The legislation includes more than a dozen safeguards. If someone opposes this option, then they don't have to use it. No one can

be forced to self-administer the medication. No doctors can be forced to give the medicine that will terminate someone's life, that is up to the person.

Studies have shown that 7 in 10 Virginians support medical aid in dying options. It is bipartisan, and crosses age groups, religions, races, and political ideologies. It is not a political issue, is a health care choice. A person is not deciding to die -- the disease has already made that choice for them, they are just taking control of the manner and setting of their death.

Please vote in favor of HB 858 at the hearing on Tuesday. If you don't know a lot about the issue, I would recommend visiting the Compassion and Choices [website](#). I have found it to be a very informative and non-partisan resource that provides a lot of good background and compelling real-life testimonials. I would also talk to your constituents. Given the partisan nature of so many issues these days, I have found in my politically diverse social group, it is an issue with wide support. You never know when you or someone you love might need this option. I only wish my dad and friend Pam had this option to ease their pain and suffering.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue and your commitment to public service.

Alma Ripps  
Alexandria, VA