

Dear Chairman Craven and Committee Members;

Please support H7100:Lila Manfield Sapinsley Compassionate Care Act filed by Representative Edith Ajello. I strongly support this legislation.

It would give terminally ill, cognitively capable individuals with 6 months or less to live the choice to request medication that they could self-ingest to die peacefully in their sleep. The older I get and the more people I talk to about their experiences, the more I believe this end-of-life option is extremely important.

I have witnessed the comfort and peace that a family member, in a state that had Death with Dignity legislation in place, felt knowing he had this option. To him, knowing the weeks ahead of him would be a battle to manage pain, and that it would take a tremendous toll on his loved ones to witness his final decline, was excruciating. Having the option to die at a time of his choosing, and not be sedated or in terrible pain, was his strong desire. Conversely, I witnessed my grandfather's frustration and anger, as he lay in a local hospital, that he could not choose to end his own life in a peaceful and dignified way. He, a health care provider, was so upset by this at the end of his life, that my mother developed a course on end-of-life options for seniors. She was a friend of Lila Sapinsley and they discussed the need for this kind of legislation. Unfortunately, my mother's Alzheimer's disease led to her slow decline over many years without being able to advocate for this legislation for others, if not for herself.

I have also known many friends and clients, in my work as a grief counselor, whose grief was intensified by their inability to help their dying loved one fulfill their wish to choose their time of death. Like my mother, they felt like they failed their loved one by not being able to help them carry out their wishes.

Now we have the option to go to Oregon or Vermont, but not all can afford to do that, and not all will be strong enough to travel to fulfill their wish to end their suffering. We need this legislation here in RI. Similar versions of this legislation have been authorized in the U.S. for 25 years. There have been no cases of abuse or coercion. The safeguards in the legislation work.

I ask that you support this legislation so that Rhode Island is the next state to authorize end-of-life compassionate care.

Help me honor my grandfather, Albert Berger, and my mother, Dorothy Friar, who both believed so very deeply in the right to choose this loving, caring end-of-life option.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith G. Hoffman, LICSW