

133 Terrace Ave
Riverside, RI 02915
February 11, 2025

Chairman Robert Craven, Sr.
Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI

RE: Support for H5219, the Lila Manfield Sapinsley Compassionate Care Act

Dear Chairman Craven and members of the Judiciary Committee:

As a citizen of Rhode Island and a longtime member of the Board of the RI League of Women Voters, I ask you to support H5219: the Lila Manfield Sapinsley Compassionate Care Act filed by Representative Edith Ajello and Senator Meghan Kallman. H5219 would give terminally ill, mentally capable individuals with 6 months or less to live the option to request a medication that they could self-ingest to die peacefully in their sleep.

Please consider the following situations from my own family, and what a difference the availability of a choice to avoid suffering and die with dignity can make. (None of these incidents occurred in Rhode Island.)

- My grandmother died in agony from stomach cancer in her eighties. She had saved aspirins to try to end her suffering but became unable to keep them down.
- My uncle shot himself to end his own torture from cancer. Not only did my aunt come home from a walk to find his brains splattered on the bedroom wall, but the sheriff had to treat her as a suspect until he could clear her. These situations could have been avoided if the option for legal, compassionate death by choice had been available.
- My father suffered from Parkinson's disease. When this terrible disease reached the point that he would have to be separated from my mother and kept on a bed with a rubber sheet due to uncontrollable incontinence, he chose to die with dignity, using drugs to stop his heart in his sleep.
- My husband's stepmother, at 99, was diagnosed with throat cancer that was inoperable and would prevent her from being able to eat. She could have been kept alive, bedridden in an institution, with intravenous feeding, but chose instead to use drugs to stop her heart. She died in her own bed, in the company of her dearest friends, listening to her favorite music, at a time of her own choosing.

At its core, this legislation is about giving dying people the option to alleviate unbearable suffering, if they choose. The safeguards in the bill are strong and work. A version of this legislation has been authorized in the US for 25 years, and in that time there hasn't been a single substantiated case of abuse or coercion.

I am 84 and healthy. Of course, I hope to die peacefully in my sleep a long time from now. But, if faced with a terrible condition, I do not want to suffer when I die, but to go peacefully in the company of my family and leave them comforted by knowing that was my choice.

How we die, like how we live, should be a personal choice. Momentum for medical aid-in-dying legislation is growing across the country. As your constituent, I ask you to help make Rhode Island the next state to authorize this compassionate end-of-life option. I look forward to hearing from you on this legislation that is very important to me.

Thank you,

Susan Escherich

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