

Written Testimony HB16-1054  
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To Chairman Kagan, Committee Members

I want to tell you why sometimes hospice is not enough.

In our more than 40 years together, we talked about it often. We even sort of joked about it. We hoped we could go together. Neither of us wanted to be the last to go, the one left alone. But most of all, we promised we'd never leave the other to linger in pain: We promised to do whatever necessary to prevent that indignity. But then, of course, we didn't have any choice.

When he was diagnosed with cancer, he refused chemotherapy. They didn't give him much of a chance in any event, so he chose to forgo the torture. At that point, he would have qualified for the provisions of HB 1054 and it would have been such a blessed gift to all of us had it been in effect. But he never complained. If he was angry, I never saw it. He said his life was so much better than he expected, given his impoverished beginnings.

There was never doubt that he would choose hospice. He wanted to die at home with his family. And, for a short while, hospice was enough. They were very attentive and diligent and came to the house frequently.

And then hospice wasn't enough. His pain level would change rapidly and dramatically. The hospice nurses had to get here. Then they had to go through the procedures and permissions to get the dosage of medication changed. So it was always a matter of hours. During which this proud, stoic man was in unbearable torment, moaning and screaming and crying out with a pain I can't even imagine.

He constantly begged me to help him die. First thing in the morning, "please, please help me go". Last thing before he slept, "if you love me, help me". I know, without a doubt, that he would have used medical aid in dying if it had been available. This law has the power to prevent this anguish for other Coloradan's.

In the last two weeks of his life, the demons came. I don't know how they got in. Every childhood bogey man, every fear, every nightmare, played as real in his brain. His hallucinations were so vivid to him. He thought we had lost our home and had to go on the street. He thought the police were holding him in some horrible place. He threw water on me because he thought I was on fire. I know for sure that there is hell on earth. It was in his head.

He was agitated. He would lurch out of bed, thrash violently, and fall, ripping out all his tubes. Even with my brother and full time help, we couldn't control him. In his lucid moments, he agreed to go to the physical hospice facility.

Of course, they weren't set up to help him. They are staffed for people who are heavily sedated. He was heavily sedated, but he would still scream for HELP so loudly he could be

heard throughout the facility. He still kept struggling out of bed and falling. We had round the clock care in addition to the hospice staff, but it wasn't enough.

We, not he, finally consented to palliative care— a coma. He was lost to us forever but his heart was still beating. Finally, it stopped.

About 2 years later, I woke up from a nightmare in which Joe was begging me to killing him. I got up and wrote this poem. I titled it "dying"

Struggled to sit  
Flesh over matchsticks  
Please kill me  
You promised  
It would never come to this

Pain raged, tormented  
thrashing, contorted  
men could not quiet  
drugs could not quell  
I promised  
It would never come to this

Pain devoured, sucked sanity  
Mind terrors, panicked frights  
Police custody, must go free  
Wife on fire, must put out  
House burning, must flee  
I never thought  
It could come to this

HELP, HELP he screamed  
Cry heard blocks away  
Heard hearts away  
Cowards, no help came  
I watched in anguish  
As it came to this

Coma came, mind went  
Struggle silenced  
Heart softened, stuttered, stopped  
I promised  
But it came to this

Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts. Thank you all for your work and your thoughtful consideration of this bill. Please vote to let the full House discuss this important issue.