

Maryland Senate Judiciary Proceedings Bill HB0643 & SB0701

Kristen Hanson's Testimony

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Members of the committee, my name is Kristen Hanson and I represent the Patients' Rights Action Fund, a national, secular, non-partisan organization opposed to the legalization of assisted suicide.

On Dec. 30, 2017, my husband, JJ Hanson, passed away from terminal brain cancer. He was only 36 years old.

JJ was a Marine Corps war veteran and volunteer fireman who served New York state under two Democratic Governors. JJ believed in personal autonomy and freedom.

Yet, JJ also understood that it is the duty of a fair and just society to protect its most vulnerable members. That's why he devoted his final days to fighting the legalization of assisted suicide.

After a seizure unexpectedly sent JJ to the hospital in 2014, we were told that he only had four months to live. Three different doctors told us there was nothing we could do.

Thankfully, we didn't listen and JJ had great success with treatment. He lived 3.5 good years following his diagnosis. During that time our son created priceless memories with JJ and we welcomed a second son into the world.

But if assisted suicide was legal, JJ could have had the lethal drugs with him during his fifth month of treatment when he questioned if we'd all be better off without him, fearing he was a burden to us.

Thankfully, JJ didn't end his life. But if he had suicide pills, he might have taken them. And you can't undo that.

Twenty years of data from Oregon show the main reasons patients request assisted suicide are disability-related concerns. Pain and suffering, or even concern about it never makes it into the top five reasons, but last year's report showed 54% of patients chose it out of fear of being a burden.

Assisted suicide laws abandon vulnerable patients like JJ who can experience depression at any point following their illness. Once patients receive the prescription, they're on their own. There's no requirement for a doctor to follow-up with them.

Please focus your efforts on improving access to hospice and palliative care, which truly addresses patients' concerns at the end of life instead of removing society's care at a time when it's needed most.

Thank you.