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SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS

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Why Has New York's Medical Aid in Dying Act Never Been Brought to a Vote?

By Stacey Gibson and Laura E. Kelly

When Stacey Gibson's husband Sid was dying in agony in 2014 from a horrific progressive motor neuron disease, he requested medical aid in dying to bring his suffering to a close.

When Laura Kelly's father, Larry, was at the end of his battle against Stage 4 colon cancer in 2015, he, too, asked for medical aid in dying so he could die at a time of his choosing, in peace, with his family around him.

Neither man was able to get his wish because medical aid in dying is not legal in New York. Their deaths were unnecessarily traumatic for both them and their families.

We began our advocacy eight long years ago, assuming that a humane bill would quickly pass in our state. The legislation would allow a terminally ill, mentally

competent adult with a prognosis of six months or less to have the option to obtain prescription medication they can decide to take to die peacefully in their sleep if their suffering becomes unbearable.

We were wrong. Year after year, the legislative session ends in Albany and we learn that yet again the Medical Aid in Dying Act has not even been brought up for a vote. Why has this painstakingly well-vetted legislation, already in effect for years in 10 states (including neighboring New Jersey, Vermont, Maine and Washington, D.C.), not had a fair hearing in New York?

One big reason the legislators give us is that although New York State polls show majority support for this legislation across our state, the representatives are not hearing enough support personally for this bill from their constituents.

When we are out in the community, we

have learned that folks simply assume that this bill will become law in our state, and are often surprised it isn't already. Unfortunately, assumptions haven't proved to be enough. Far too few of us are taking the step to actually call or write our representatives and make it clear we expect our state senator and assemblymember to support this law.

We all need to be advocates for terminally ill people who have enjoyed control and autonomy throughout their lives and now may want this same freedom to have self-determination at a very critical life moment. None of us knows what the future holds for us, but we should be able to have access to as many options as possible.

The new legislative session in Albany opens in January. Too many terminally ill New Yorkers have already greatly suffered while dying as they waited for our

legislators to act. This must be the year we pass the medical aid in dying option for all New Yorkers.

Contact your representatives today and tell them you want the Medical Aid in Dying Act (A995/S2445) to become law in 2024. And tell your friends and neighbors throughout the state to call today. Then call your representative next week. And yes, keep calling throughout 2024 until this bill becomes law. Every call and letter is tallied. Make your voices heard.

We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Stacey Gibson and Laura Kelly are volunteer co-leaders for the Lower Hudson Valley region of New York on the statewide campaign to pass the Medical Aid in Dying Act. Gibson is a resident of Garrison. Kelly lives in Mount Kisco.