



April 20, 2018

Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
822 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Assembly Member Gottfried,

Hello, everyone. My name is José Hernandez and I would love for you to not support Assembly Bill A.2383A, the medical aid in dying bill, because you just don't know how this would affect other individuals' lives. My mother was diagnosed with stage IV ovarian cancer in 1988 when she was just 28 years old in Puerto Rico. They had given her 6 months to live. My mother and my father made the decision to get her to the United States immediately for treatment.

After arriving in the United States and undergoing life-altering surgery where they removed her ovaries, bladder, and most of her large intestine, formed a false bladder where she had to catheterize from and rerouted her intestines into a colostomy bag. After intensive chemo and radiation therapy where it destroyed one of her kidneys and left her with a partially functioning kidney, she survived.

Shortly after all of this happened, my mother suffered from debilitating pain and depression and if given the option she would have chosen medically assisted suicide. Where would that have left me and my two younger siblings? My father wasn't the best man on this planet I grew up with him cheating on and beating my mother.

Despite my mother's suffering from debilitating pain and depression for years after surviving stage IV ovarian cancer, she was able to raise my sister who was 4 years old, my brother 7 years old, and myself who was 8 years old until two of us were adults. My mother eventually passed away 13 years later due to kidney failure and septic shock.

In 1995, I had an unfortunate accident where I broke my neck and became disabled at the age of 15. This was another opportunity that my mother could have taken and if given the choice would've chosen to accept medically assisted suicide. While I was in rehab she actually attempted suicide where she drank an entire bottle of antidepressants. Fortunately, she was found by one of her sisters and was immediately taken to the hospital.

My mother played an essential role in me being who I am today, her strength and perseverance throughout her journey with cancer and the disabling effects of surgery and chemotherapy and radiation made me a stronger person. Did I forget to mention that as soon as my mother came out of surgery, my father abandoned her with three small children and that she raised us alone?

My mother survived stage IV ovarian cancer. She passed away August 17, 2002, less than a month before my 22nd birthday. I graduated high school and I enrolled in a community college so I can make my mother proud of my accomplishments in spite of having a disability. On the day of my mother's wake I got up, got dressed and went to the community college and registered for the following semester.

My mother was strong for her children and it made us stronger and you better. If she would have chosen medically assisted suicide, we would have ended up with my father who was more interested in how many

women he could sleep with and drugs rather than his children. My brother and I would have been products of the streets of New York; taking turns going in and out of jail. Instead, as a C-5 quadriplegic, I am an advocate for disability rights, I have been a peer mentor for many individuals with spinal cord injury, I am an employee at United Spinal Association, and I am here able to give you my story on why medically assisted suicide should not be an option.

My mother survived 13 years. Yes, there was pain, yes there was depression, however despite all of the pain and depression, there were moments of joy: 13 Thanksgivings, 13 Christmases, 13 New Year's, close to 39 birthdays (not including hers), and all of the precious memories I have of my mother doing simple things like turning on the Spanish music every Saturday and dancing with the mop while she cleaned the house.

This was our journey and it would've been cut short if she was given the option.



Thank you.

José Hernández

José Hernandez
Program Specialist, United Spinal Association

Cc: Assembly Members, Standing Committee on Health
Assemblywoman Amy Paulin

