

Good morning/afternoon members of the Committee of Senate Health and Human Services.

My name is Laura Gray and I live in Las Vegas.

I am here to express my strong support for SB 239,

My father died two years ago after a prolonged illness and a brief battle with cancer. On paper, dad died of cancer complications. But in reality, he died from starvation and dehydration.

He was not able to eat or drink in the final days of his life.

My family watched helplessly as dad writhed in pain. The nurse gave him morphine and we knew that we would no longer be able to communicate with him. From that point on, we took turns to bathe him, turn his body to avoid bed sores, change his diapers and administer more morphine.

Dad was unresponsive except when we administered morphine or changed his diaper. He grimaced in pain, which only added to our heartbreak.

As we endured this horrific experience, I asked myself: Why should any human be forced to experience so much unnecessary suffering?

That is when I learned that there are laws around the country that allow dying people like my dad, merciful options when suffering becomes too much to bear. Medical aid in dying is an option I would want available to die peacefully, if I found myself with a terminal disease.

Some people here today will try to discredit the need for this compassionate end-of-life care option by saying that our state has the necessary options for dying Nevadans. They may even share anecdotal stories that seem to validate these concerns.

While I respect the positions of these individuals, I would like to emphasize that people who request the option of medical aid in dying are already dying.

They simply want to maintain some comfort in their final days, to ease their pain and suffering, and to die peacefully.

While palliative care and hospice programs provide extraordinary comfort to patients and work wonders for many dying people and their loved ones, there are times when even the best palliative options cannot alleviate pain and suffering.

Only the dying person can decide when their pain and suffering is too great to withstand.

The option of medical aid in dying puts the decision-making power where it belongs: with the dying person.

Authorizing medical aid in dying improves quality and knowledge of end-of-life care for everyone. It empowers those at the end of life to decide on the option most closely aligned with their personal beliefs with the support of their medical team, family, friends and their spiritual counselors.

Honorable legislators, I urge you to put yourselves in the shoes of dying Nevadans. Please understand how they feel just knowing that they are forced to suffer during their final days.

You have the power to make a difference. I urge you to allow dying Nevadans their last wish: the ability to die on their own terms without unnecessary suffering.

I urge you to support SB 239.

Thank you.