

# Illinois Voices in Support of Medical Aid in Dying

## Deb Robertson | Lombard, IL

"After I was diagnosed with cancer in January 2022, I started to think about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life, because I knew my time was limited. I did research on medical aid in dying and I thought, "This is what I want to be advocating for." I want my family and friends to remember the good times. And I want to make a decision for myself about when it's time to go. If I had the option of medical aid in dying in Illinois, it would allow me to die peacefully, with dignity. It would allow me and my family to say our goodbyes and let go. As a former social worker, I've advocated for homeless youth rights. Now, with aid in dying, I'm advocating for something that affects me."

## Miguel Carrasquillo | Chicago, IL

(1980-2016)

"I've had numerous conversations with God throughout my life, especially during my illness. I cannot understand why people judge me as a sinner for wanting to die peacefully rather than enduring excruciating pain until the end of my life. I live my last days in horror of mind-splitting headaches, blackouts, blindness, convulsions and electric shocks from the incurable brain tumor that has spread to my liver, stomach, testicles and other vital organs. I don't want my tumor to dictate how I will die. But it is not affordable or practical for the vast majority of terminally ill people to move to another state where aid-in-dying is authorized, away from their friends, family and medical team, just to die peacefully."

## Sophie Meyn | Urbana, IL

"Having an incurable brain tumor means needing to be thoughtful about the likely reality of facing the end of my life earlier than I would like to accept. I don't want to die; I very much want to live. I love my life, I love my daughter, I love my husband, and I don't want to leave them. I want to keep trying as long as there's hope. But I want to avoid being trapped in my body, in pain as it's breaking down, knowing that I'm dying, for who knows how long. I would prefer to have the right to decide for myself whether or not medical aid in dying makes sense, rather than have strangers keep the option unavailable to Illinoisans."

## Andrew Flack | Oceanside, CA; Naperville, IL

(1988-2022)

"I want to be alive. I want to continue teaching my special ed students, I want to continue watching hockey, I want to keep playing video games and spending time with my roommate's dog, Jaxson. I don't want to have cancer, and I don't want to be in this position. But there's not much I can do about that. What I can control is how I go out from this disease. Cancer will eventually take my life, but I'd rather not suffer when I could go out peacefully and on my own terms. Without the option of medical aid in dying in Illinois, however, I can't move back home to spend my final months with my family. Cancer isn't something anybody chooses, but I can choose how I move forward."

*Andrew availed himself of California's aid-in-dying law and died peacefully in November 2022.*

## **Verna O'Brien** | Romeoville, IL

(1961-2022)

The last time I saw my partner, Jack, he was in so much pain despite the excellent hospice care he was receiving. I remember crying, and Jack crying a little too. Jack was dying, imminently. There was no stopping that. But those final moments between us didn't have to be wracked with pain. Jack could have avoided days of suffering if medical aid in dying were authorized in Illinois. Instead, Jack suffered during his last days on earth. For what? As someone living with a disability, I believe I should get to make my own decisions about what kind of medical care I receive when I reach the end of my life. No one else should get to make that decision.

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## **Dianne Clemens** | Normal, IL

"My oncologist has a phrase I really like: "Forge on." I like that it's action oriented and it's strong. "Forge on" implies that I have some control. It is power. That's what I want with living and that's what I want with dying. I want to be empowered to take a proactive approach to the reality of my death. I want to die with dignity and grace, with respect, options and with a tiny bit of control. But the state of Illinois does not yet provide the option of medical aid in dying to its terminally ill residents. I hope I live several more years, but when meaning is not there anymore, or if I were in significant pain, I don't see why I should be forced to extend my suffering. I want the peace of mind of being able to determine when enough is enough."

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## **Jeff Boarini** | Evanston, IL

"My partner of 45 years, Joanne "Rocky" Kunz, was given an advanced stage 4 cancer diagnosis at the beginning of 2021. After chemo and immunotherapy failed, and her pain became increasingly intense, we stopped treatment. We both felt medical aid in dying was an important option and had even discussed moving to a state with this option, but we have a son with disabilities and his home and network are here. I am angry that Illinois forced my wife to suffer needlessly and pointlessly. Knowing she was ready to die, and there was no way I could help her, I'm left feeling like I failed her. It was such a tragic ending for such a beautiful person."

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## **Kari Alice Lynn** | Urbana, IL

(1944-2021)

"Death does not scare me, but pain and suffering do. I'm 75 years old and the future of how my lung cancer manifests is unknown. I don't want to linger in pain, suffering for months. I don't want to experience ongoing air hunger. My cancer can spread anywhere and everywhere, including my brain, and depending on where it metastasizes, the symptoms can be excruciating. Illinois does not yet authorize medical aid in dying. Because of this, I am planning to voluntarily stop eating and drinking (VSED) to control my dying process when I'm ready to leave this realm of existence. I wish medical aid in dying was an option so that I could be assured to have control over when I die, with the ability to be surrounded by my loved ones."

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