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TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF THE "DEATH WITH DIGNITY" BILL

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My mother just died last year, so this is still very fresh and painful to me. She declined quite rapidly towards the end. In fact, she had four trips to the emergency room during her last four months. A few weeks before she died she was in terrible agony. She screamed nonstop. The image I'll always be left with is of a caged lion roaring, roaring with her mouth open so wide you could see her tonsils. That was my dear, sweet, little old mother.

My mother was 95 years old and had recently developed dementia which got progressively worse. She was not able to think lucidly anymore or express herself clearly. She couldn't feed herself and could hardly swallow. It took three people to help her go to the bathroom, screaming and flailing the whole time. She wasn't long for this world. However, she had just been evaluated for hospice and turned down. I guess at that point her heart and lungs and kidneys were still functioning properly. One week later they were not.

This Death with Dignity bill, the way I understand it, would not help people like my mother. It's not for people with dementia. You have to be able to make decisions for yourself. Even though she had a living will and a do-not-resuscitate order, they would not apply to this situation.

However, this bill could help people like me. People with cancer and other fatal diseases. I'm lucky: my cancer is in remission and I am healthy now—for the time being. But if it were to come back in a particularly aggressive and lethal form, and if I were still able to think and act for myself, I would at least want the opportunity to have a choice to die with dignity before I turned into a caged animal. If I can help it, I don't want to be forced to suffer the agony I watched my mother go through.