

THE

Dignity Report

A publication of the Death with Dignity National Center

FALL 2020

Diversity
Freedom
Autonomy
Trust
Equity
Dignity
Financial
Stability
Moral
Courage
Inclusion

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GIVE DIGNITY

Death with dignity laws provide peace of mind to qualified terminally ill residents in *California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Hawai'i, Maine, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington.*

You can help expand the option to all Americans with a generous contribution:

- a one-time or recurring gift;
- a gift in honor or in memory of a loved one;
- a gift of stock or mutual funds;
- a legacy gift.

To learn more and contribute, visit **DeathwithDignity.org/Support.**

Thank you!

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Our Core Values In Action

At Death with Dignity National Center, we strive every day to put our core values into action.

Dignity.
Trust.
Freedom and Autonomy.
Financial Stability.
Moral Courage.
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



In this issue, we're sharing stories that spotlight our six core values and show how they guide every aspect of our work.

THE WEIGHT OF THIS MOMENT

From the COVID-19 pandemic to an economic crisis and a long-overdue reckoning on racism, we're living through an historic upheaval. I don't have to tell you it's a difficult time; I imagine you feel the weight of this moment, too, in your own way.

SUPPORTING, STRATEGIZING, AMPLIFYING

What I can tell you is that at Death with Dignity, we're continuing to provide practical and actionable information on end-of-life care. We're supporting grassroots efforts across the country and strategizing for the coming legislative session. We're amplifying the voices of patients, their loved ones, and stalwart advocates.

The only way we succeed is with the support of people like you who believe in our movement.

Thank you.



Peg Sandeen, Executive Director

Introducing our SouthWest Strategy:

A Recipe for Success in Three Key States

As we prepare for the 2021 legislative session, we're working with legislators, lobbyists, and advocates in states across the country to develop sound strategies for advancing bills.

A COORDINATED EFFORT

In September, we launched our **SouthWest Strategy**: a coordinated effort to secure passage of medical aid in dying legislation in Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico. We're supporting advocates on the ground by providing grant funding, mentorship and skill-sharing between local leaders, online education and networking, and time-tested model legislation.

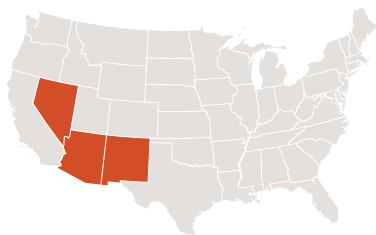
FORMALIZING PARTNERSHIPS

We formalized partnerships with grassroots organizations *Arizona End-of-Life Options* and *New Mexico End-of-Life Options Coalition* last year. Representatives of both groups participated in our State Leadership Incubator program and received grants from Death with Dignity to help them bolster their constituent outreach and advocacy efforts.

SETTING THE STAGE

Our efforts in Nevada date back six years and span three legislative sessions. We worked closely with bill sponsors to advance legislation and provided testimony at legislative hearings. In the lead-up to the 2021 session, we are strengthening the political strategy and on-the-ground relationships necessary to succeed in the Silver State. 📖

Visit **DeathwithDignity.org/SouthWest-Strategy** to learn more about our work and how to get involved.



"New Mexico is ready for success in 2021 with deeply committed and experienced legislative champions, strong grassroots advocacy, an increasingly supportive legislature, a well-vetted, progressive bill, and a compassionate governor who will sign it."

—BARAK WOLFF, NEW MEXICO
END-OF-LIFE-OPTIONS COALITION

5 Questions for an Advocate:

Mary Ganapol, Arizona
End-of-Life Options

DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THE DEATH WITH DIGNITY MOVEMENT?

My former spouse had terminal cancer that led to a terrible dying process. If he or I had known about medical aid in dying, I would have dropped everything and moved him to Oregon.

After he died, I bought a home-care business, which gave me lots of exposure to people going through hospice.

HOW DID YOU FIND AND CONNECT WITH ARIZONA END- OF-LIFE OPTIONS [AZELO]?

I started organizing meetups and connecting with people involved in anything death-related. I met [AZELO Director] Dwight Moore through one of those groups and knew I wanted to get involved.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE WITH AZELO?

I'm the Southern Arizona Lead. I reach out to people who live in Tucson and the surrounding counties. It's essential for us to have a presence in southern Arizona, especially because prior bill sponsors



represent southern districts.

Right now I'm lining up endorsements from other organizations for our cause. It's important to engage local groups and state chapters of national organizations to build our credibility.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY FOR THE DEATH WITH DIGNITY MOVEMENT IN ARIZONA?

Educating people. So many people aren't familiar with medical aid in dying, even though 70 million people have access to it.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic is making people more comfortable talking about death and dying, which opens the door for communication about our issue.

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO SUPPORT YOUR WORK?

Go to our website and see what we're up to. Sign up to volunteer. Subscribe to our newsletter. Contact us! 📖
AZEndofLifeOptions.org

The Debt We Owe

I believe the entire death with dignity movement owes an enormous debt to Black civil rights and social justice organizations. Our social movement playbook is built on strategies, tactics, and lessons learned from the leaders of Black organizations.

Those of us leading social justice organizations today have benefited time and again from the work of Black civil rights leaders. This is an unpaid, and mostly unacknowledged, debt. I thank them for their work.

At Death with Dignity, we are dedicated to listening to and working alongside communities of color and all marginalized individuals to achieve justice and equity, for as long as it takes.

"Find Peace in Your Strength":

Readers Respond to Karen Wentworth's Story



Karen Wentworth

In July, we published online a three-part series featuring an essay by Karen Wentworth, a Maine resident with terminal cancer who plans to use the Maine Death with Dignity Act to die on her own terms.

MAKING PEACE WITH LIFE

"As I approach my final days, I am making peace with life," Karen wrote. "I want to live, but am content to die. Terminal cancer has determined my fate, but I still can control how I choose to leave this Earth. The Maine Death with Dignity Act makes this possible."

We received numerous moving responses to Karen's story.

Thank you for sharing your courage with me and believers in death with dignity. You have my heartfelt support. I hope to have the same resolve as you when my time comes.

—CRAIG R.

I desperately want to have the choice, as you do, to decide when I want to say my fond farewell to family and friends. May all those you love, and all those who love you find peace in your strength.

—KATHRYN P.

You are a brave soul. I, too, want to go softly and quietly. Thank you for you.

—IRENE P.



Karen Wentworth with her partner, Charlie Thieme

SHARING AND CELEBRATING

Sharing—and celebrating—Karen's story is a fitting way to commemorate the first year of Maine's law, which took effect on September 19, 2019.

As with many others who have chosen to access medical aid in dying, Karen's decision to do so was driven by her desire for autonomy and peace at the end of life. Having this option allows Karen, in her words, to "pass in the warm comfort of compassion with peace and love in my heart." 🌿

To read Karen's story and more on the first year of death with dignity in Maine, visit DeathwithDignity.org/Maine-first-anniversary.



JoAnn and Steve Ruppert

Supporting Self-Determination

Donor Spotlight: JoAnn Ruppert

JoAnn Ruppert is a self-described “bulb person.” She observes and nurtures irises, with which she’s long been fascinated, in her home garden, alongside tomatoes she’s grown from seed and other plants that thrive in Santa Fe.

Whether discussing flowers, her four black Labradors, or the ranch south of Santa Fe she owns with her husband, Steve, JoAnn’s enthusiasm shines through. She is equally passionate about human rights issues, including an individual’s freedom to make decisions about their healthcare at the end of life. This steadfast belief is rooted in her background in clinical social work and experience working with individuals who did not enjoy this freedom.

“It is truly our right to have choice over our bodies in whatever context, I believe,” she shared with us. “Now in my early 70s, these decisions gain increasing significance.”

This belief in self-determination inspires her to support Death with Dignity through her charitable endowment. “I love to be able to support those charities I feel strongly about and contribute to the betterment of the world,” JoAnn said. ☞

Staff Recommendations:

What We’re Reading and Listening To

We’ve all been spending more time at home—and more time delving into books, podcasts, and shows. We’ve put together some of our favorite articles, podcast episodes, and more to help you learn more about death with dignity while passing the time indoors.



PEG SANDEEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Evaluation of Racial Disparities in Hospice Use and End-of-Life Treatment Intensity in the REGARDS Cohort,” JAMA Network Open, Aug. 24, 2020

This study explored the differences in hospice use between Black participants and white participants. I spend a lot of my time reading research reports about end-of-life care and hospice use, and I appreciate this study’s focus on explaining and understanding racial disparities in the last six months of life.



REBECCA SCHLESSINGER, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Making the Call: The ethics of physician-assisted death

Drs. Ezekiel Emanuel and Jonathan Moreno, both bioethicists, host the podcast “Making the Call,” exploring thorny medical and ethical issues in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The final episode of Season 1 featured a conversation with our very own Peg Sandeen about the ethics of medical aid in dying.



VAL LOVELACE, DIRECTOR OF STATEWIDE CAMPAIGNS

The Racial Complex: A Jungian Perspective on Culture and Race, Fanny Brewster, PhD

In my quest to learn more about and deconstruct the influence of colonialism and racism in my life, I chose this book after hearing Dr. Brewster speak shortly after the death of George Floyd. ☞



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THE Dignity Report

*Terminal cancer has determined
my fate, but I still can control
how I choose to leave this Earth.
The Maine Death with Dignity
Act makes this possible.*

— KAREN WENTWORTH,
MAINE ADVOCATE

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