

Bill Number: SB0701
Testimony by: Christine Hodgdon
City: Baltimore, Maryland
Position: Support

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. My name is Christine Hodgdon, I live in Baltimore, Maryland, and I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 701, the End-of-Life Option Act.

As a young woman living with terminal cancer, this issue is deeply personal for me. In 2015, I had just been promoted to Director of Conservation Programs at my organization and I was advancing my career as a conservation biologist. I was also training for a triathlon and living a very full and satisfying life.

But at the age of 34, the discovery of two lumps in my chest threatened to derail everything I had worked towards. A biopsy revealed I had breast cancer. Within weeks of my initial diagnosis, I also received the devastating news that the cancer in my breast had spread to my lung, making my cancer stage IV metastatic. With an average 2.5-year lifespan, I was suddenly forced to confront my own mortality.

There is no cure for stage IV metastatic cancer. On average, 116 people die every day in the United States from metastatic breast cancer, or MBC.

The reason I cannot testify in person today is because I am in Florida attending a memorial service for a friend who died from MBC. She was only 34 years old. I was with her in her final days and witnessed the unnecessary pain and discomfort she experienced, as well as the mental torment of losing her autonomy and independence.

Death is a constant in my community. I've lost several dear friends to MBC, and I know I will lose more. I've seen firsthand how painful a death from cancer can be, how it can rob individuals of their strength and agency, and take away the simple joys life can offer.

A friend of mine with MBC shared with me powerful reflections about how her disease has impacted her. "I can't do simple functional things like getting down on the floor to play with the loves of my life: my niece and nephews," she told me. "I was a pediatric feeding specialist and I can't even pick up an infant anymore, much less what I used to do every day. I will never move normally again. That is mental torture."

Like my friends, I have no control over the trajectory of my disease. Because we still have no cure for MBC, I know that eventually, this disease will kill me. There will come a time when treatments that have kept my disease under control will no longer be effective, and I will be forced to make difficult decisions about how I want to die.

I understand that for religious reasons, many oppose this bill, but another dear friend with MBC, also a practicing Christian, reminded me that even Jesus had the power to choose to end his suffering. That informs her support for the compassionate end-of-life option this bill would provide.

Cancer is a ruthless disease that I am powerless against- MBC has taken away my career, forced me to be on drugs that can be severely debilitating, and stolen the lives of countless friends. I have learned to live my life knowing I cannot control any of these factors, but I, and other Marylanders with a terminal illness, deserve to have control over the timing and manner of our own death.

I want to die with dignity and autonomy—something all individuals with a terminal illness deserve. This is why I support Senate Bill 701 and urge you to vote “Yes” on this vitally important bill.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.