

THE

Dignity Report

WINTER 2021



How to Advocate During a Pandemic

In This Issue

Advocacy Against All Odds	3
Tools of the Trade	4
Your Guide to Advocacy in a Pandemic	6
5 Questions for Rebecca Brown	8
I Want to Have the Choice	9
“She Made a Difference”	10
Staff Recommendations	11

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!


520 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1220
Portland, OR 97204-1510

(503) 228-4415

info@deathwithdignity.org

DeathwithDignity.org

 /DeathwithDignity

 @DeathwDignity

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

George Eighmey, JD **OR**
President

Carol Pratt, PhD, JD **OR**
Vice President, Treasurer

Eli D. Stutsman, JD **OR**
Secretary

Midge Levy, ACSW **WA**
Lisa Vigil Schattinger, MSN, RN
OH

Deborah Ziegler **CA**
David Mayo, PhD **MN**, *Ex Officio*

STAFF

Peg Sandeen, PhD, MSW
Executive Director

Shaun Fairlee
Outreach Coordinator

Emma Granquist
Social Work Intern

DeVida Johnson
Operations & Fiscal Manager

Elia Lawatsch, EdD, MSW
Social Worker

Val Lovelace
Director of Statewide Campaigns

Rebecca Schlessinger
Communications Manager

Advocacy Against All Odds



January is always a busy month at Death with Dignity as state legislative sessions begin and political campaigns come to life. Despite 2020's challenges—and, in some cases, because of them—we are well-positioned for success in what is sure to be another unusual year.

STRATEGY AND SUPPORT

As we enter a new year, we continue to lay the groundwork for long-term success in Southwest and East Coast states. I'm spending my days coordinating our campaign activities in Massachusetts, New Mexico, and New York. And, as always, we're providing guidance and resources to budding advocates across the country.

TOOLS AND TRAINING

Many legislatures cut their sessions short last year, which forced us to suspend some of our campaign activities. We used that time to create resources for end-of-life planning and digital tools to help anyone become a more effective advocate. Pages 4-7 of this issue provide a sneak peek at our online Action Center and a how-to guide for advocacy during a pandemic.

NOW IS THE TIME

The COVID-19 pandemic and its staggering death toll have transformed the conversation about death and dying in the U.S. Our issue has never been more relevant or more urgent. People are thinking about how they want to die and exploring options that can help them achieve a peaceful and dignified death.

Now is the time to push for passage of laws that allow more people to have the end-of-life experience they seek. After a year of strategizing and adapting, we're ready.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peg Sandeen'.

Peg Sandeen, Executive Director

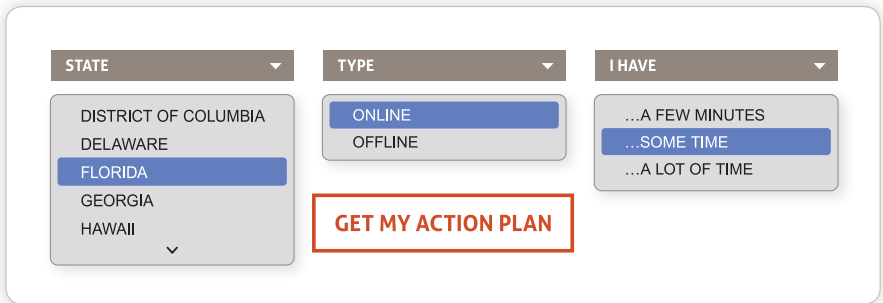
Tools of the Trade

Choose Your Own Advocacy Adventure

We've distilled the essentials of advocacy into powerful, user-friendly digital tools to give you the resources you need to succeed.

THE ACTION CENTER

Our online Action Center helps you choose your own advocacy adventure with a wide range of actions and how-tos tailored for you. Whether you have 10 minutes, 10 hours, or even more time, you'll find an action that fits your bandwidth and skills.



The screenshot shows a user interface for filtering actions. It consists of three dropdown menus and a button. The first dropdown menu is labeled 'STATE' and has a list of states: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DELAWARE, FLORIDA (highlighted in blue), GEORGIA, and HAWAII. The second dropdown menu is labeled 'TYPE' and has two options: ONLINE (highlighted in blue) and OFFLINE. The third dropdown menu is labeled 'I HAVE' and has three options: ...A FEW MINUTES, ...SOME TIME (highlighted in blue), and ...A LOT OF TIME. Below these filters is a red-bordered button labeled 'GET MY ACTION PLAN'.

Explore tutorials on how to meet with your legislator (in person and virtually), write an op-ed for your local newspaper, organize an event (when it's safe to do so), and more. If you just have a few minutes, you can customize and send a pre-written letter to your legislators urging them to pass a law in your state. All tutorials are available as PDF downloads.

Visit DeathwithDignity.org/Action-Center to get started.

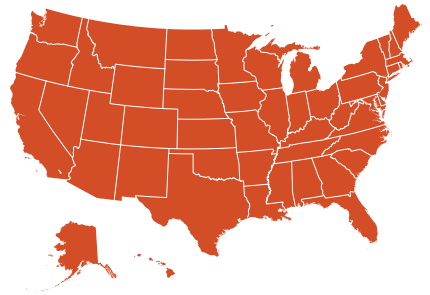
THE DIGNITY50 ROADMAP SERIES

Wondering where to begin? Become an informed and effective advocate in the Dignity50 Roadmap series! In this live, three-part online series, we'll share the three key essentials every death with dignity supporter needs to know. Topics include an overview of the legislative process; model legislative language and terminology; and a beginner's guide to political messaging.

DeathwithDignity.org/dignity50-roadmap-mini-series/

THE STATE STATUTE NAVIGATOR

In days of yore, aspiring advocates seeking to pass a law in their state had to search far and wide to find legislative language from other jurisdictions. We built the State Statute Navigator to solve this problem. This first-of-its-kind tool is a complete, searchable database of currently enacted death with dignity laws that breaks down the laws in each state by searchable terms and allows users to compare laws by state.



DeathwithDignity.org/State-Statute-Navigator

MODEL LEGISLATION

The aid-in-dying statutes currently in effect are modeled on the Oregon Death with Dignity Act. We've crafted model legislation that advocates, policymakers, healthcare providers, and scholars can use to familiarize themselves with death with dignity legislation. Find and download your copy on the State Statute Navigator page. [↗](#)

Your Guide to Advocacy in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic scrambled legislative agendas, timelines, and everything else that comprised business as usual. This year, creative adaptation is the name of the game.

Lawmakers in states across the country are making decisions about how they'll meet with each other and with their constituents—in person, remotely, or a hybrid of the two—in an ongoing pandemic. Meanwhile, lobbyists are determining how best to push for passage of laws when they may not be able to meet in person with decision makers. Resourceful advocates are taking lessons learned from last year's mostly-remote efforts and honing their tactics for 2021.

Political campaigns succeed when advocates show up and take action. Here's our to-do list for advocates who want to make the most of the 2021 legislative session:

KNOW THE BASICS

When does your legislature convene?
Is there a death with dignity bill in play?
If so, who are the sponsors? Can you visit the capitol in person? You'll find answers to these questions on your state legislature's website or on our site at the link below.



Visit **DeathwithDignity.org/in-your-state** for a comprehensive state-by-state (plus D.C.!) directory.

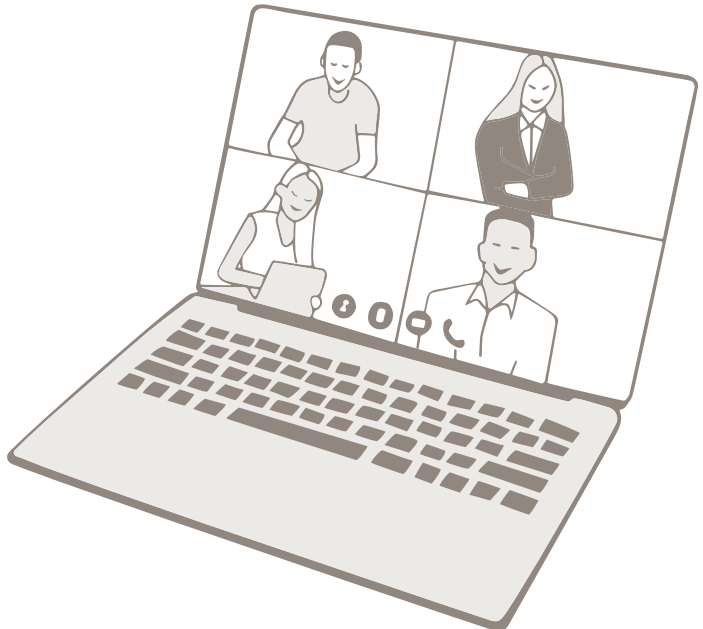
TAKE ACTION

If your legislature is holding an in-person or virtual hearing on your bill, read up on how to draft written and oral testimony. Our online Action Center has a comprehensive tutorial to help you do just that; visit **DeathwithDignity.org/take-action** to get started.

If your state legislature is not considering an aid-in-dying bill this year, you can write your lawmakers and urge them to introduce one. Each one of our state pages has a “send a letter” action that helps you communicate with lawmakers in five minutes or less.

HONE YOUR ZOOM SKILLS

Chances are you’ve taken part in some virtual gathering over the past year, whether a family reunion or a work meeting. If you haven’t yet honed your video conferencing skills, now’s the time, because it’s likely that some aspect of legislative activity will have moved online. And as anyone who’s been on an online video call knows all too well, technology can fail, so make sure you have a backup plan to communicate with lawmakers and/or your fellow advocates should technology crash unexpectedly. Visit **tinyurl.com/YourGuidetoZoom** to learn more. 📖





5 Questions for Rebecca Brown, of New Hampshire Death with Dignity

◀ *Rebecca Brown with New Hampshire Death with Dignity's Bob McCown in 2019.*

1. What's your personal connection to the death with dignity movement?

My husband suffered from a degenerative neurological disease that, towards the end, left him mostly immobile and in pain every day. He chose to take his own life instead of endure unbearable suffering. I advocate for death with dignity in his honor, because it's a choice that would allow people like him to exercise autonomy and have control over their final days.

2. You recently became executive director of a new 501(c)(3) organization and are working to launch a new political action committee. What informs your strategy?

I'm informed by my service as a New Hampshire State Legislator from 2012 to 2016. In considering strategically and politically how we move toward a law passage, it became clear that building a grassroots movement is crucial. We won't win with a top-down legislative approach—there are too many political obstacles.

3. How are you continuing your advocacy—and keeping the pressure on lawmakers to consider a bill—in the midst of a pandemic?

We held a virtual meeting for legislators and are using Zoom for organizing and building the new alliance. We're hopeful that in-person community conversations may start this summer, and we may try online community discussions earlier in the year.

4. What does the legislative landscape look like in New Hampshire this year?

The 2021 legislative year will be consumed with budget issues, so we're looking at 2022 for bill introduction. We're taking the long view, and will work this year to build support so the politically advantageous choice regardless of party affiliation is to support death with dignity.

5. How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the conversation around death with dignity?

COVID-19 and our aging population are bringing new attention to end-of-life issues, including death with dignity laws. I hope people will be motivated to address their own concerns and desires around the end of life through honest and compassionate conversations with loved ones. 🐾



I Want to Have the Choice

Nancy Rhodes Johnson with husband and stepchildren in 2018.

BY NANCY RHODES JOHNSON, MICHIGAN

Cancer does not define me, but it dominates my life nonetheless.

Before my body was overtaken by the pain that accompanies a debilitating terminal illness, I was a teacher, an athlete, and an artist. I painted 20-foot murals and was the first woman to paint a mural dedicated to women in the military that is permanently installed in a federal building.

My life was full and fulfilling. But then the pain began.

I was diagnosed with kidney and bone cancer, and given a prognosis of anywhere from 10 months to 15 years. It's been seven years, and in that time I have lost most of my mobility, and pain is a constant companion.

I am grateful for the years I've had to spend with my family, but the uncertainty of my illness keeps me living in limbo.

Should my prognosis worsen, having an option like death with dignity would give me the freedom to choose how and when I die. But currently, my home state of Michigan does not have a death with dignity law.

Sharing my story is the first step in my advocacy journey. I know that in every state that has passed a death with dignity law, personal stories played a central role in building public support and motivating lawmakers to act.

If we raise our voices together, we can make real, lasting change. 🗳️

Do you have a personal connection to the death with dignity movement? Visit DeathwithDignity.org/share-your-story to make your voice heard.

“She Made a Difference”

Donor Spotlight: Pamela LeMay

**MOTHER, DAUGHTER, WIFE,
SISTER, TEACHER, HEALER.**



That’s the inscription on a memorial bench Pamela LeMay and her family installed at a favorite beach in Washington to honor her daughter, Jennifer. Just 37 when she died of terminal cancer, Jennifer touched many lives through her active involvement in her community and her work as a doula and a counselor in private practice.

“The over 200 friends and neighbors whose paths crossed hers and who told their stories at her celebration of life remind me that she made a difference,” Pamela told us.

Jennifer’s initial prognosis was 18 months, but through several treatment regimens she was able to live for nearly three years. In her final months, she experienced significant pain and suffering, which led her to explore end-of-life options that would allow her to die peacefully. She qualified for medical aid in dying, and chose to access Washington’s death with dignity law.

Pamela is a member of our Dignity Circle, composed of donors who have included Death with Dignity in their estate plan. “My legacy gift is my commitment that others should have the control that was so important to Jen,” Pamela said.

“Jen felt that cancer took so much from her. She wanted control over something near the end, and she got that power through the death with dignity law approved in our state.” 📖

To learn more about joining the Dignity Circle, visit [DeathwithDignity.org/create-your-legacy](https://www.deathwithdignity.org/create-your-legacy).

*Pamela LeMay
with her daughter,
Jennifer, in 2014*

Staff Recommendations:

What We're Reading and Watching

Here are the stories and series we're curling up with this winter:



DEVIDA JOHNSON, OPERATIONS AND FISCAL MANAGER

Going Gracefully: a vlog by Alua Arthur of Going with Grace

Death doulas provide emotional and practical support, comfort, and advice to those nearing the end of their lives and their families. Lately I've found myself enjoying the vlog of Alua Arthur, a death doula, attorney, and ordained minister. In her 60-second videos, she offers advice and valuable information pertaining to death and dying. Alua is genuine, funny, and brash, but comes from a place of love and compassion with her advice.



VAL LOVELACE, DIRECTOR OF STATEWIDE CAMPAIGNS

Hallelujah, Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy;
book by author Anne Lamott

Anne's humor and candor help me maintain my sense of self in the context of the world's ongoing weirdness. Her words are refreshing, comforting, and thought-provoking.

"I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us." —Anne Lamott



REBECCA SCHLESSINGER, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Ask a Mortician; a web series by Caitlin Doughty

Talking daily about death can feel like a heavy job. That's when I turn to mortician and author Caitlin Doughty. Her YouTube channel *Ask a Mortician* brings some levity to the field of death and dying with topics like "7 Habits of Highly Effective Death-Positive People" and "Funeral Fashion." 📺



520 SW 6th Ave. #1220
Portland, OR 97204

NON PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
PORTLAND OR
PERMIT NO 3584

THE Dignity Report

*If we raise our voices
together, we can make
real, lasting change.*

— NANCY RHODES JOHNSON,
MICHIGAN ADVOCATE



DeathwithDignity.org | DeathwithDignity | @deathwdignity