

Testimony in Support of SB 2226

Residential End-of-Life Facilities

House Human Services Committee

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Jolene Rohde

Thank you, Chairman Weisz and members of the House Human Services Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 2226. My name is Jolene Rohde, and I am a Bismarck resident. I believe residential end-of-life facilities are needed in North Dakota.

During my husband's last weeks of his five-year battle with cancer, I was in the uncomfortable position of convincing a doctor that Larry needed to be hospitalized because he was extremely weak, was dehydrated and unable to eat, he was unable to ambulate, and was very ill, and I could no longer care for him in our house. I could not physically get him to and from the bathroom, my son and I could not get him to and from the car into our house or lift him if he fell. My other alternative was to place him in a nursing home. Ultimately, he was admitted into the hospital and stayed there until he died. Larry had a massive stroke shortly after his admission to the hospital which was followed by a series of seizures. He was agitated and unresponsive during his final days.

Unfortunately, my son and I do not have a family to rely upon. Both my and Larry's parents were already gone by the time he needed round the clock care. I am an only child and so was Larry and we also only have one child. Our son was 9 years old when Larry was diagnosed with cancer and began his struggle and was just 15 when Larry died in the fall of 2019.

Although I'm a nurse and had the medical knowledge to care for him, I could not physically or emotionally take on the responsibility of being Larry's full-time caregiver, and I did not want my son to be burdened with the responsibility of helping to care for his dying father. In addition, I still had to go to work and my son had to go to school, but the time came when Larry could not be left home alone. Finally, I did not want him to die in our home because I felt it would be traumatic for my son and myself as we wanted to remain in

our home after his death and the constant memory of his death there was not something we felt we could cope with or handle.

If the Rockstad Foundation's proposed Gaia Home existed two years ago in Bismarck, it would have been a blessing. We did not have the option to move Larry into a homey environment like the Gaia Home will provide. We did not have the peace of mind knowing we could stay with Larry as much as possible while he received 24-hour care. The thought of being able to be in a home with him where I knew that he was safe and receiving care, while my son and I spent quality time with Larry is such a comforting and reassuring thought. It's an option we did not have, but other families in North Dakota could.

In fact, when I'm facing the end of my life, I hope my son has the opportunity to choose a residential end-of-life facility for my final days and to assist him with the demands and emotional issues this time brings. Please pass Senate Bill 2226. This important legislation would create a new chapter of Century Code to allow the North Dakota Health Department to license residential end-of-life facilities. North Dakotans deserve another option when it comes to end-of-life care for their loved ones.

Thank you, Chairman Weisz, and the members of the House Human Services Committee for hearing my testimony today and your consideration.