Good Afternoon. My name is Reverend Kathleen Rolenz, and I’m serving as the Interim Senior Minister of Unity Church-Unitarian in Saint Paul, MN. I am speaking on behalf of the Association of Congregations, who in 1988, passed a General Resolution in support of our rights, as religious and spiritual persons, to advocate for the right to self-determination in dying. And so I stand before you in support of the Minnesota End-of Life Options Act Bill.

I have been a minister for over 30 years now, and have had the privilege of attending to the deaths of many parishoners, colleagues and friends. So I want to tell you the tale of two deaths. The first one, was a parishioner, I’ll call him John, who received a terminal diagnosis of lung cancer. His cancer had grown to the point that he was slowly suffocating to death and in great pain. He reached out to me – his minister – to ask if I could put him in touch with an agency that could help him end his life. He came to this decision after many conversations with me, with his wife and his children. However, because we lived in a state whereby Medical Aid in Dying was not offered, and because he did not want to put any of us in legal jeopardy, he ended his life alone. We could not be there with him in his final moments. The pain of that knowledge still lives within his widow to this day.

The second story is the death of a colleague of mine, let’s call her Joan, who moved to Oregon in her retirement. After some years of enjoying retirement, she too was diagnosed with a fatal form of cancer that would take her life. She did everything she could to live, but at a certain point, she – and her family – realized that the disease would end her life. She reached out to her doctor, followed the recommended protocols and choose the day and the time when she would take the medications which would end her suffering. Her husband was there. Her children were there. They held her – they sang to her – then loved her into the Mystery of Death which we know is beyond our comprehension. Passing this bill does not force anyone to make a choice they don’t want to – instead; it allows for a person to be fully present to their loved ones and to God. May you have the courage to allow any of us to do the same.