

Brittany Maynard, right-to-die voice, advocates from the grave

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(RNS) Brittany Maynard chose to die November 1, but on what would have been her 30th birthday, Wednesday (November 19), her voice in support of the Right to Die movement rang loud.

Maynard, who had an aggressive brain tumor, was the face of Compassion & Choices, the advocacy group campaigning to legalize physician-assisted dying in all 50 states. She still is.

On her birthday, the group released a “call to action” video with passages and narration drawn from prerecorded videos with Maynard and other advocates explaining why the right to die by legal prescription is important to them. It is now legal in Oregon, Washington, Montana, Vermont, and New Mexico.

In the video, Maynard concludes: “If there’s one message to come away from everything that I’ve been through, it is no matter what life kind of presents you with, is never be afraid to use your own voice. And even if you are uncertain, even if your voice is shaking, ask the questions you want to ask, speak up for yourself. Advocate.”

Maynard’s decision has been lambasted by conservative religious voices all the way to the Vatican, where an official called the choice “reprehensible.”

Maynard’s mother, Debbie Ziegler, said Tuesday (November 18), in an open letter on the Compassion & Choices website, that “reprehensible” is a word for describing Hitler or pedophiles, not her daughter.

“People and institutions that feel they have the right to judge Brittany’s choices may wound me and cause me unspeakable pain but they do not deter me from supporting my daughter’s choice,” she wrote.

Barbara Coombs Lee, Compassion & Choices co-founder and co-author of Oregon's assisted-dying legislation, told media Wednesday that Maynard's birthday was the kickoff date for the group's campaign because "we would be remiss if we let the day pass without noticing how selfless she was" in speaking out about her decision.

Lee cited a "new army" of volunteers and activists in 12 states, including Pennsylvania state Rep. Mark Rozzi, a Democrat, and Wyoming state Rep. Dan Zwonitzer, a Republican, who have introduced legislation in their states and spoken out on their personal commitment to the issue.

Rozzi spoke of the "gut-wrenching" experience of seeing his father die from the same cancer that would have killed Maynard. He introduced the legislation nine days after Maynard first went public.

"This is a human right, not a Republican or a Democrat issue," he said.

"Advocate" may not be the last word the public will hear spoken by Maynard. Compassion & Choices spokesman Sean Crowley said the latest video, taped in August, will be mined for more quotes that may inspire activists.