



# BECAUSE *we are* CATHOLIC

## Westminster cancer survivor impresses Senate committee with ‘powerful’ testimony

Some of the most emotional testimony in the past two years has taken place during the physician-assisted suicide hearings in the Judicial Proceedings committee.

A year after former NFL player O.J. Brigrance delivered what Sen. Michael Hough called “the most powerful testimony he had ever heard”, 26-year-old cancer survivor Beth Puleo captivated the committee with her courageous story. So much in fact that Hough and Sen. Justin Ready escorted her out of the hearing room for a private conversation.

“Her testimony about the value of life was probably the most powerful I’ve ever heard,” Ready wrote on his Instagram account.

Committee chairman Bobby Zirkin commended her on doing “a fabulous job” and warned the next witness “good luck following that.”

“I totally didn’t expect that reaction,” Puleo said. “I was honestly shocked when Sen. Ready wanted to talk to me in the hallway. I wasn’t embarrassed by the attention but was surprised when people started applauding after I finished speaking. It was really a great experience and an honor.”

Puleo drew praise from Del. Christian Miele less than a week earlier when she testified on the bill in the House of Delegates.

Puleo has been dealt multiple setbacks in her life but continues to fight back. The

Westminster native was diagnosed with childhood brain cancer at age five. After surgeries and radiation, doctors told her parents she had weeks to live.

“Six weeks after my second brain surgery, the tumor grew back,” Puleo told the committee. “Radiation was my only option for survival. I spent that summer undergoing radiation treatments, not how many seven-year-olds spend their summer. By that September, I started to experience side effects from the radiation. The radiation destroyed my cancer but I became physically disabled. Within four months of the radiation, I could not walk, crawl or do much of anything on my own. After doctors performed numerous tests, doctors told my parents, ‘take her home, love her, she’ll be dead in a couple weeks’. Unwilling to accept that prognosis, I started to receive therapy. I retaught myself to walk and how to live again.”

Two years before she was diagnosed, her father was stricken with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and given two years to live. Frank Puleo lived eight years and died with dignity at home, surrounded by his loving family.



Senators Michael Hough and Justin Ready take a quick break during their duties on the Judicial Proceedings committee to meet with Beth Puleo, a cancer survivor and testifier.

“If my dad gave into death only two years after being diagnosed, he would’ve never seen me struggle with cancer and conquer it,” Puleo added. “Watching him slowly deteriorate with each day was not easy but seeing him fight to the end inspired me to continue working hard and stay determined despite the obstacles I faced. At the same time, if he had chosen assisted-suicide, I would not have the cherished memories I do of him. Instead I would have grown up without a father.”

Puleo graduated from Mount St. Mary’s in 2013 and now does motivational speaking. She met Gov. Larry Hogan at an American Cancer Society event in November and now considers her fellow cancer survivor a friend.

“It is always amazing to share my story, especially against something that I feel very passionate about,” Puleo said. “To know that my story could change one life is incredible.”

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