

[SUBSCRIBE](#) | [LOG IN](#)

# Carrie Ann Lucas, Champion for Disabled Parents, Dies at 47

Carrie Ann Lucas, second from left, in 2018 in Windsor, Colo., with her children, from left, Asiza, Heather, Adrienne and Anthony. Ms. Lucas fought for the rights of the disabled, especially those who are parents. Carrie Ann Lucas

By [Katharine Q. Seelye](#)

Feb. 27, 2019



Carrie Ann Lucas, who championed people, especially parents, with disabilities and won a major lawsuit to make Kmart more accessible, died on Sunday in Loveland, Colo. She was 47.

Her sister, Courtney Lucas, said the cause was complications of septic shock.

Ms. Lucas, who lived with a rare form of muscular dystrophy for three decades, was an effective advocate for people with disabilities. A lawyer, she successfully forced several businesses to make their premises more accessible in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

And last year, through her forceful lobbying, she helped [change Colorado law](#) to ensure that the disability of a parent or potential guardian could not be the sole basis for denying custody, adoption, foster care or guardianship of a child.

The legislation grew out of her own struggle to adopt her niece, who was in foster care. Ms. Lucas, who used a power wheelchair, breathed through a ventilator, had low vision and minimal hearing, and relied on a feeding tube, went on to adopt a total of four children, all with disabilities.

“We hear things all the time like, ‘How can you be a parent if you can’t throw a football for your son?’” she [told The Colorado Independent](#) in 2016.

“As disabled people,” she said, “we are always addressing the issue of how society devalues our lives and experiences.”

On Monday, members of both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) of the Colorado legislature paid tribute to Ms. Lucas and held a moment of silence in her honor. “Carrie Ann Lucas is a testament to doing everything that you can with what you’ve got,” State Senator Julie Gonzales said.

Ms. Lucas’s commitment was evident in her relentless campaign against a measure to allow doctor-assisted suicide (sometimes called “right to die” or “death with dignity”) in Colorado. An active member of the disability rights group Not Dead Yet, she appeared at numerous forums to express her outrage at what she saw as the implicit suggestion that people with disabilities had such a low quality of life that their lives were not worth living.

Despite her protestations, voters [approved the measure](#) in 2016. Doctor-assisted death is now legal in seven states and the District of Columbia.

It was a rare defeat in a long career of advocacy. Perhaps her most notable legal victory came in a class-action lawsuit against Kmart, to make its stores more accessible.

Ms. Lucas was the lead plaintiff in that suit, filed in 1999, and in a [settlement](#) in 2006, Kmart agreed to pay \$13 million in damages to shoppers — the largest payout in a disabilities case at the time — and to bring its 1,400 stores into compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Kmart agreed to spend as much as \$70 million over eight years to do so.

Carrie Ann Lucas was born on Nov. 18, 1971, in Twentynine Palms, Calif. Her mother, LaVerne (Rupert) Lucas, was a sales manager; her father, Philip Emory Lucas, served in the Marine Corps for 20 years and was stationed at the base there. When he retired, the family moved to Windsor, Colo., where he was an appliance repair technician.

Carrie Ann graduated from high school in Windsor and went to Whitworth University in Spokane, Wash., graduating in 1994 with a double major in education and sports medicine.

While in high school, she began to lose muscle strength, and by age 17 she was walking with braces. She was in a wheelchair by her early 20s.

Still, she went overseas. She taught middle school science for two years in Saipan, part of the Northern Marianas in the Western Pacific. Her goal was to become a minister, and when she returned to Colorado she earned a master of divinity degree at Iliff School of Theology in Denver in 1999.

As her health deteriorated, her sister said, she became involved with the [Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition](#), which works for equal rights for people with any kind of disability. She investigated and monitored disability rights cases there.

At the same time, she sought to [adopt her niece](#), Heather, then 9, the disabled daughter of her half brother, Eric Gover, whose family, in Tennessee, was unable to care for her. But because of her own disabilities, Ms. Lucas ran into resistance.

She fought the system and, with the help of a court-appointed special advocate, was able to adopt Heather. The experience inspired her to make sure that the same thing would not happen in Colorado.

Driven by the prejudice she saw against parents with disabilities, Ms. Lucas enrolled at the Sturm College of Law at the University of Denver, where she received a full scholarship. She graduated in 2005 and went on to adopt three more children, Asiza, Adrienne and Anthony, all of whom have disabilities.

Ms. Lucas was executive director of Disabled Parents Rights and served on the board of directors of the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado. In 2017, she ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the Windsor City Council.

She was among several people with disabilities who were [arrested](#) in 2017 on charges of trespassing after a 58-hour sit-in at the Denver office of Senator Cory Gardner. They were protesting the Republican plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which would have reduced Medicaid funding and eliminated services

that make it possible for people with disabilities to live independently.

In addition to her sister, her half brother and her children, Ms. Lucas is survived by her parents and her partner, Dr. Kimberley Jackson. Her half sister, Kelli Mann, died in 2017.

For the last several years, Ms. Lucas had been writing a blog, [DisabilityPride.com](http://DisabilityPride.com), which provided an unvarnished view of her life.

One of her final entries, the day after Christmas, described her fear of what would happen to her children, now in their late teens and 20s, when she was gone. She said she hoped that she had given them “the tools to thrive if given appropriate supports.” But, she added, she was terrified that they would be separated and lose contact with one another.

“My kids are all adopted and lost their first family,” she wrote. “I desperately don’t want them to lose this family too.”

A version of this article appears in print on, on Page A28 of the New York edition with the headline: Carrie Ann Lucas, Vigorous Defender of Disabled Parents, Is Dead at 47. Order Reprints | Today’s Paper | Subscribe



ADVERTISEMENT

---

**The New York Times** [Go to Home Page »](#)

NEWS

**Open in the app**

OPINION

ARTS

LIVING

LISTINGS & MORE

---

© 2019 The New York Times Company

[Contact Us](#) [Work with us](#) [Advertise](#) [Your Ad Choices](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Terms of Sale](#) [Site Map](#) [Help](#) [Subscriptions](#)