

A Better Way Forward



A Message from the Catholic Bishops of Illinois

Last Spring, SB 3499 was introduced to legalize assisted suicide in Illinois. The bill did not pass, but it is going to be re-introduced again so we ask you to prayerfully consider and act on our message about assisted suicide.

Assisted suicide makes it legal for a physician to prescribe an array of lethal drugs to a person diagnosed with a terminal disease who requests to end his or her life. The Catholic Bishops of Illinois oppose any legislation that would legalize assisted suicide as there is a better way forward for our State.

Proponents argue that this legislation will end suffering at the end-of-life. We agree that no one should needlessly suffer or have to watch a loved one experience unnecessary pain and suffering. Fortunately, there are now effective ways to make a person more comfortable at the end of life through palliative care. This relatively new specialty utilizes physician-led teams to care for the whole person – physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually – to relieve the symptoms and the stress that often accompany serious illness and side effects of treatment. A better way forward is to expand the number and availability of palliative care programs throughout Illinois.

Drawing on data from Oregon, the first state to legalize assisted suicide in the US, reports show that pain is not among the top reasons why a person would want to end their life: loss of autonomy; concerns about being either a financial burden or a time commitment to family and friends; and loss of the ability to engage in activities that make life enjoyable are the most cited reasons for choosing assisted suicide. We support expanding mental health coverage and strengthening social supports, such as community programs that compassionately walk with those dealing with depression and feelings of hopelessness.

The unintended consequences that arise from legalized assisted suicide include a large range of possible abuses. It is alarming that in states with legalized suicide, there are documented cases of people being denied life-saving medical treatment by insurance companies in lieu of the much cheaper option of life-ending drugs. The poor and those with disabilities are particularly in jeopardy as they are the most vulnerable to such abuses. In response, every major national organization that represents people with disabilities is opposed to assisted suicide.

The American Medical Association (AMA) has summed up the case against assisted suicide well. “Physician assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician’s role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would provide serious societal risks.”

Assisted suicide is not the compassionate solution for those who are suffering. Through palliative care, expanded access to mental health care, and stronger family and community support, providers and families are finding better ways to accompany these people compassionately that truly confer the love for, and dignity of, each human life.

Please go to www.ilcatholic.org/take-action or call 217-528-9200 to find out how to contact your local elected official to tell them to vote NO on SB 3499.



A PRAYER AGAINST ASSISTED SUICIDE

Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature and redeem all people. We ask your help for our brothers and sisters who are ill. Support them with your power and shelter them from sadness. Keep them firm in faith and serene in hope. Also help those who assist the sick and care for them in their time of illness. Inspire our society to resist the temptation of assisted suicide for the elderly, the sick, the vulnerable and all your people. May life’s beauty and sanctity be respected among all our brothers and sisters. All this we ask in your holy name. Amen.