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A BETTER WAY FORWARD

A Message on Assisted Suicide from the Catholic Bishops of Illinois

April 2024

Legislation has been introduced to legalize assisted suicide in Illinois. SB 3499 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 this legislation; there is a better way forward for our state.

As Pope Francis underscores, “We must accompany people towards death, but not provide death or facilitate assisted suicide.”

Assisted suicide disregards the Hippocratic Oath, “Do No Harm,” and sends the wrong message about the role of medical professionals. We cannot say it any better than the American Medical Association, “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.”

This legislation brings a range of possible abuses. It should alarm us that in states with legalized assisted suicide there are documented cases of people being offered inexpensive lethal drugs to end their life rather than being provided more costly treatment. The poor and those with disabilities are particularly in jeopardy because they are the most vulnerable to abuses. Every major national organization that represents people with disabilities is opposed to assisted suicide.

In Oregon, where assisted suicide has been legal since 1997, data show that pain is not among the top five reasons why a person wants to end their life. Loss of autonomy, feelings of being a burden and being less able to engage in activities that make life enjoyable are most often cited as reasons for choosing assisted suicide. A better way forward is to expand mental health coverage and strengthen social supports such as community programs to help those dealing with depression and feelings of hopelessness.

No one wants to suffer or experience a loved one’s suffering. Fortunately, there are effective ways to alleviate suffering or make a person more comfortable at the end of life through palliative care. This relatively new specialty area of medicine cares for the whole person – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually – to relieve symptoms and stress that often accompany serious illness or side effects of treatment. A better way forward is to expand the number of palliative care locations and services in all areas of Illinois.

Assisted suicide is not a compassionate solution for those who are suffering. There is a better way forward that truly offers compassionate care and compassionate choices. Please go to www.ilcatholic.org or call 217-528-9200 to find out how to contact your local elected official to tell them to vote NO on SB 3499.