

# Archbishop Lori commends State Senate for defeating physician-assisted suicide

Archbishop William E. Lori commended the Maryland State Senate for defeating what he called a “deeply-flawed” bill to legalize physician-assisted suicide in Maryland.

The controversial measure failed on the floor of the State Senate March 27 on a 23-23 vote. A version of the legislation had already passed in the House of Delegates.

“Physician-assisted suicide violates God’s most sacred gift and enables individuals to decide arbitrarily when life is no longer worthwhile or no longer worth living,” Archbishop Lori said. “Thank you to all those who worked so hard to defeat this legislation. Thank you for standing up for the sanctity of life.”

The legislation would have made it legal for adults considered mentally capable and who have a prognosis of six months or less to request to receive a prescription for lethal drugs.

Archbishop Lori and the Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC), legislative lobbying arm of the state’s Catholic bishops, had been strong opponents of the bill. In an ongoing campaign, they urged Catholics to contact lawmakers and express their opposition to the legislation known as the “End of Life Options Act.”

The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee had approved dozens of amendments to the bill last week before advancing it to the full Senate. The bill’s opponents argued that no amendments could adequately protect those whom they said are put at greatest risk: the disabled, veterans, the elderly, those with mental illness or a terminal prognosis.

Gov. Lawrence Hogan Jr. did not indicate whether he would have signed the bill had it come to his desk.

Jennifer L. Briemann, executive director of the MCC, thanked those involved in what she described as a concerted effort to defeat the bill.

“Between all the Catholics in the state who came out in force against this bill and our partners in the disability rights community, especially the Arc Maryland, as well as countless physicians and mental health providers who made sure that this bad bill was defeated, we owe them all gratitude,” Briemann said.

Those voices included Dr. Marie-Alberte Boursiquot, a Columbia-based internist, parishioner of the Baltimore Basilica and past president of the Catholic Medical Association, a national organization.

“Thank God,” Boursiquot said of the bill’s defeat. “Ultimately, what this is all about is suicide, the intentional taking of one’s life. Our position is that a physician can never be in the position of taking a life. We save lives. We do not take lives.”

Boursiquot testified Feb. 15 before a joint hearing of House Health and Government Operations and Judiciary committees in Annapolis. Later, she was among opponents of the bill who met with Gov. Hogan’s chief legislative officer.

“Medicalizing death does not address the needs of dying patients and their families,” she said at the Feb. 15 hearing.

Her testimony highlighted what she described as three “fundamental flaws” in the original legislation:

- “The possibility that a patient is suffering from depression when contemplating suicide. Patients entertaining PAS (physician-assisted suicide) are denied suicide prevention support. Depression today can be managed.
- “What happens if the attempt to commit suicide fails?
- “How does one determine whether a patient is being coerced to end their life?”

This was the furthest that attempts to legalize physician-assisted suicide have gotten in the Maryland General Assembly.

“What we saw this year, proponents thought that the make-up of the new General

Assembly would help passage (of the legislation), Biermann said. “No matter what side of the aisle you were on, however, whether Democrat or Republican, from the Eastern Shore or Montgomery County, ultimately our legislators saw this bill for what it was, flawed.”

In a March 27 news release, “Compassion and Choices,” the driving force behind the legislation, vowed to continue the fight to enact the bill into law “in the near future.”

“We’re ready,” Boursiquot said. “We’re not going to rest on our laurels. This will rear its ugly head again.”

*Paul McMullen and George Matysek Jr. contributed to this story.*

*Also see:*

Catholic doctor testifies against physician-assisted suicide at Annapolis hearing