

# Increased urgency accompanies annual Maryland March for Life

ANNAPOLIS - As crowds gathered outside of St. Mary's Church the evening of March 4 for the Maryland March for Life, Roger Donnelly handed out hundreds of pro-life signs.

Donnelly, the life activities director for the Knights of Columbus Maryland State Council, was attending the Maryland March for the first time. A parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville, he has an issue when *any* vulnerable people are not protected - from preborn children, to those with disabilities, to the elderly.

He was among hundreds who turned out to make their presence felt in the streets of the state capital for the Maryland March, in its 40th year and in the midst of a politicized climate in general and in particular, a heated Maryland General Assembly session.

Just three days before the March, the "End-of-Life Option Act," which would legalize physician-assisted suicide (PAS), passed the Maryland House Health and Government Operations and Judiciary Committees with a vote of 24-20. The bill will go to the full House of Delegates this week.

As Archbishop William E. Lori celebrated Mass at St. Mary's immediately preceding the March, he addressed the issue with the congregation, which packed the church beyond standing room.

"As citizens, we should be very alarmed by the possibility that physician-assisted suicide could become legal in our state," the archbishop said in **his homily**. "The bill under consideration is regarded by many as a 'Death with Dignity' bill, but the death which this bill would allow for is anything but dignified."

Archbishop Lori said the bill would "further undermine the dignity of human life."

The bill would allow lethal medication in pill form to be taken home. Those

prescribed it would not be required to take the pills in the presence of a medical professional or family member – or to take them at all.

“In an already drug-ridden society, lethal pills are suddenly on the loose,” Archbishop Lori said. “In the face of Maryland’s epic opioid crisis, this is not good public policy.”

That, he said, is just the beginning of the dangers: with rising health care costs, it might mean the government and insurance companies using physician-assisted suicide as a cost-effective alternative to life-saving measures or palliative care.

“This has already happened in states where physician-assisted suicide is legal,” Archbishop Lori said, acknowledging that PAS supporters would dispute that assertion. “In European countries where euthanasia has been legal for decades, it is no longer a question of a right to die, but it is now an obligation to die when one’s condition has become burdensome to the family or to the state-run medical system.”

Those issues, Archbishop Lori said, are not “a matter of Christian doctrine, but rather a matter of sound reasoning about the bad consequences of the legislation now under consideration.”

“It is also the case, however, that many people of faith, like ourselves, oppose this bill,” Archbishop Lori said. “As you know, religious proponents of legislation are sometimes accused of trying to impose their faith on others and on society at large; they are accused of trying to make church doctrine the law of the land.”

This, the archbishop said, is not true.

“In the state that pioneered the legal recognition of the God-given right of religious freedom, you and I have the right – and we have the duty – not only to bring the truths and values made true by faith into the public forum, but also to shape a society where God’s gift of life is respected from the moment of conception until natural death.”

Before the Mass, Students for Life hosted a youth rally outside, in a tent overlooking Spa Creek.

Speakers from Students for Life exemplified its pillars: education, supportive services, industry impact, public policy and rapid responses; and shared their outreach efforts.

Mount de Sales Academy brought one of the largest groups to the March, all in blue and white hats.

Senior Carleigh Stokes attended both the National and Maryland Marches for Life for the first time this year (the former was Jan. 18). Education, she said, is key in keeping the pro-life movement alive for future generations.

"I became pro-life because I was educated through my Catholic school," said Stokes, who worships at the Catholic Community of Ascension and St. Augustine in Elkridge and St. Philip Neri in Linthicum Heights. "I think (education is) the best thing you can do."

Many area parishes sponsored buses to the March, and many individuals came on their own. Danielle Goodman attended the state March for the first time this year.

"With everything happening ... this year we said we've just *gotto* go," said Goodman, a parishioner of Christ the King in Towson. "During the day (leading up to the March), we were just praying we could be a voice for those who are unheard."

Goodman chose to bring her children, Casimir, 12, and Veronica, 10, "so they'll always understand how precious life is." She said it is a good opportunity for them to learn to stand up for their beliefs, and it shows them they are not alone.

Marchers moved from the St. Mary campus to the area near the State House, fislling a portioned portion of Bladen Street for a rally, which Archbishop Lori opened in prayer. Ryan Bomberger, who was conceived in rape but was given the gift of adoption by his biological mother, was the keynote speaker.

He compared abortion to a modern slavery.

"But guess what happened to slavery?" Bomberger said. "It got abolished."

Kelly Stauffer, with the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, shared her late-term

abortion story and how she found healing through a Rachel's Vineyard retreat sponsored by the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Other speakers included Kim Frazer of 40 Days for Life, who encouraged participants to go see the movie "Unplanned" in theaters the weekend of March 29-31.

Therese Hessler, the associate director of respect for life for the Maryland Catholic Conference, gave a legislative update.

"As many of you know, the value of life is under attack in our state," Hessler said, urging marchers to call and email their legislators as soon as they returned home and respectfully make their opinions on physician-assisted suicide known.

In August 2018, Maryland House Speaker Michael Busch (D, Anne Arundel County) submitted a proposed constitutional amendment to include abortion in the Maryland Constitution. Busch withdrew the proposed legislation Feb. 23, but promised to bring it back during the 2020 General Assembly.

"This is only a short-term win," Hessler said. "We must prevent it from passing next year."

A constitutional amendment would prevent any abortion regulations from being introduced in the General Assembly.

The March drew Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Annapolis resident Sarah Spalding attended the March with her sister, Heidi Mitchell, a Calvert County resident.

Spalding had abortions, but knowing it was wrong, came to join the pro-life movement, joining forces with 40 Days for Life and praying outside of her former abortion clinic.

"My heart was aching about everything that happened," Spalding said. "I know the other side - it's not good."

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