

Maryland Assembly will not consider physician-assisted suicide

Legislation regarding physician-assisted suicide (PAS) will not be introduced during the 2018 Maryland General Assembly.

Lawmakers did not file a bill that would legalize the controversial practice for this session, which falls on an election year. Bipartisan opponents have been successful in striking down PAS legislation in the past.

“For the past three years, the Maryland General Assembly has considered a deeply flawed physician-assisted suicide bill,” said Jennifer Briemann, deputy director for the Maryland Catholic Conference. “Every year they are reminded that the opposition runs deep – physicians, mental health providers, those that advocate for persons with disabilities, elder law attorneys – just to name a few.

“The legislation is unfixable.”

Previous bills that would have legalized PAS have failed due to fierce opposition. Critics cite flaws such as leaving the vulnerable, including the elderly and those with intellectual disabilities, open to abuse and coercion.

Terminal prognoses of six months or less would qualify for PAS under previously filed legislation. According to Maryland Against Physician Assisted Suicide and other opponents, those predicted outcomes are often inaccurate.

Bills legalizing PAS do not require a mental health evaluation or a medical professional or witness to be present when a lethal dose of a prescribed drug is taken. PAS also is cost-saving for insurance companies.

“We will continue to work with our coalition partners to ready ourselves for the bill to be introduced again in 2019, and we stand ready to fight once again on behalf of the vulnerable - the sick, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and those who live with mental illness,” Briemann said. “Our opposition will not fade and our efforts to defeat this legislation will not weaken.”

The Maryland Catholic Conference, meanwhile, is promoting a bill that will change the law on fetal homicide. The bill is being called “Laura and Reid’s Law,” for Laura Wallen, a Howard County teacher, and the son she was carrying when she was murdered in September.

Her boyfriend, Tyler Tessier, is charged with her murder, but not with that of their unborn son, Reid. Wallen was 14-weeks pregnant at the time; Maryland law only recognizes the murder of viable fetuses, which currently is around 24 weeks.

Wallen’s parents are supporting the bill.

Supporters deem “Laura and Reid’s Law” a pro-woman, anti-domestic violence bill. In Maryland, the No. 1 cause of pregnancy-associated death is homicide, with current or former intimate partners the perpetrators in 63 percent of the solved cases.

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