



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

320 CATHEDRAL STREET • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201 • 410-547-5437 • FAX: 410-547-8234

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

February 16, 2017

Dear Friends in Christ,

I write on a matter of some urgency to invite your help and continued prayers.

As you may be aware, for the third consecutive year, Maryland lawmakers are considering legislation that would legalize the dangerous practice of physician-assisted suicide. The legislation would allow doctors to prescribe lethal drugs – typically a dose of 100 pills – to terminally ill patients who want to end their lives.

The law reflects a growing lack of respect for the dignity of every life, and places vulnerable populations at great risk of coercion or undue influence, most especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, those suffering from mental illness, the elderly, and those who cannot afford adequate healthcare.

The law's proponents led by the group "Compassion and Choices" (the former Hemlock Society), claim that the bill simply provides patients options at the end of their lives to relieve their suffering. However, experts in end-of-life care know that with proper pain management and palliative care, there is little to no reason for patients to suffer in their last days. True compassion calls for surrounding loved ones nearing the end of their lives with our caring presence, our prayers, and the assurance that they are not a burden.

Pope Francis said physician-assisted suicide is part of a "throwaway culture" that offers a "false compassion" and treats a human person as a problem. "True compassion does not marginalize anyone, nor does it humiliate and exclude – much less considers the disappearance of a person as a good thing," the Pope said. He criticized "those who hide behind an alleged compassion to justify and approve the death of a patient."

This bill poses myriad dangers. There is no guarantee a terminal six-month prognosis can ever be accurate, and there is no requirement that patients asking to end their lives be screened for depression. There is no requirement that the physician prescribing the lethal drugs have any prior knowledge of the patient's medical history, and the bill does not require that patients notify their family of their intentions. The list goes on and on.

February 16, 2017

Page 2

The out-of-state forces pushing to legalize physician-assisted suicide in Maryland and elsewhere are powerful and very well-funded. To counter their efforts, the Church in Maryland is working together with a broad-based coalition of disability rights advocates, healthcare professionals, mental health professionals, advocates for seniors, and members of other faith communities. Our efforts will require the assistance of each and every one of us, and I urge you to get involved through these opportunities:

- Learn more about the dangers of physician-assisted suicide and stay informed by signing up for alerts from the Maryland Against Physician Assisted Suicide Coalition at <http://stopassistedsuicidemd.org/>.
- Communicate with your legislators by signing up for the Maryland Catholic Conference's Catholic Advocacy Network at www.mdatholic.org/joincan.
- Pray for your legislators and all those working to protect the precious gift of life from the dangers of this legislation.

May God bless you for your faithful witness to the Gospel and your daily acts of love and service to those most in need of the embrace of our Christian community.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William E. Lori". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore