



Massachusetts Catholic Conference
150 Staniford Street, Suite 5
Boston, Massachusetts 02114-2511
617-367-6060
www.macatholic.org

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Public Health

From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director

Re: House Bill 1998, “An Act affirming a terminally ill patient’s right to compassionate aid in dying.”

Date: December 17, 2013

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“MCC”) respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to House Bill 1998, “An Act affirming a terminally ill patient’s right to compassionate aid in dying.”

House Bill 1998 would add to the Massachusetts General Laws new language authorizing physicians to provide lethal doses of medication at the request of patients with terminal conditions seeking assistance in committing suicide.

The legislation is fundamentally flawed. The legislation defines “Terminally ill” as “having a terminal illness or condition which can reasonably be expected to cause death within 6 months, whether or not treatment is provided.” Studies have shown that a six-month prognosis for a terminal illness can be wildly inaccurate. There is no requirement that a physician be present when the patient takes the lethal prescription, and there is no requirement that the patient notify family members.

The legislation, for example, includes a “consulting physician confirmation waiver” which allows the consulting physician to waive their examination under a number of enumerated conditions under the broad umbrella of “undue hardship” for the patient. The bill, if enacted, has no requirement that any statistics be tracked for patients who would utilize the legislation.

The Catholic Church teaches that life itself is a gift from God. Life is to be nurtured and cherished until *natural* death, not hastened death. The Church teaches that all suicides are a tragedy and that we are called to comfort the sick, not to help them end their lives. Modern medicine offers many alternatives to allow any patient, no matter their level of pain or suffering, to feel comfort at the last moments of their lives. As a society, we should be supporting improved hospice and palliative care options, not legal suicide.

As you may recall, in November of 2012, the voters of Massachusetts voted “no” on a similar proposal at the ballot box. The voters at that time were aware of the many flaws in the ballot initiative. While this version of the legislation is different, it remains deeply flawed, as demonstrated above.

In view of the foregoing concerns, the Massachusetts Catholic Conference urges the committee to give House Bill 1998 an unfavorable report recommending that the bills ought not to pass.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.