

Physician Assisted Suicide Massachusetts Initiative Petition

A group, calling themselves Death with Dignity, has filed an initiative petition in Massachusetts to legalize physician assisted suicide. This is the first step toward placing this question on the statewide ballot on Election Day this November.

The petition would give a patient who has been diagnosed with less than six months to live the ability to request a prescription to end his/her life. If passed by a majority of voters, physician assisted suicide would become legal in Massachusetts on January 1, 2013. No additional legislative or other approvals would be necessary.

This initiative petition, if voted into law, would allow our government to authorize suicide. It ignores the fundamental value of life and the reality that even when a person is in a debilitated state, both the person and his or her loved ones can gain much from each day of life.

The petition also has several flaws, which, in and of themselves, strongly recommends a “no” vote. Among them are:

- The initiative does not require patients who request suicide to first receive a psychiatric evaluation. Patients who request suicide may be suffering from a highly treatable depression or other mental illness.
- The initiative petition includes an arbitrary number of months to live (six); as research and experience tells us patients often outlive their diagnoses – whether it’s two months, six months, or many years.

These critical flaws point to why an initiative petition is the wrong way of deciding public policy on such a serious, complex and intensely personal issue. A statewide campaign of competing messaging, advertisements and press releases does not address the gravity of this issue and the permanent consequences of legalizing (physician assisted) suicide.

The state legislature has been considering physician assisted suicide for many years and has not enacted it into law. Proponents are trying a new tactic by using a ballot question to go around the legislative process.

This issue should be treated with far more deliberation than a ballot question. It demands a more measured and rigorous public discussion – one that allows for the input of a wide range of health care professionals – doctors, mental health professionals, hospice workers, and others – religious leaders of all denominations and patients who are facing serious illness.

A coalition has formed to defeat this initiative petition on Election Day. Here’s how you can help right now:

- Talk to your friends and family about this initiative. Make sure they know it will be on the ballot in November and encourage them to vote NO!
- Collect names and contact information of people you have identified as NO voters and send it to defeatPAS@gmail.com
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper arguing why this initiative is a bad idea.
- Contact your local officials to share your position on this initiative.
- Email us your contact information to defeatPAS@gmail.com . As the campaign progresses, we will send you updates and new campaign materials that you can share with your friends and family.

The campaign to defeat this initiative is still in the early stages. We need to use the coming months to build an organization we can mobilize as we get closer to Election Day. The above steps will help us accomplish that. Thank you for your assistance with this critically important effort. Lives will be in the balance as Massachusetts voters go to the polls in November.