

Physician-Assisted Suicide: What's at Stake?

Q: Why shouldn't assisted suicide be legalized?

A: To sanction the taking of innocent human life is to contradict a primary purpose of law in an ordered society. A law allowing assisted suicide would demean the lives of vulnerable patients and expose them to exploitation by those who feel they are better off dead. Such a policy would corrupt the medical profession, whose ethical code calls on physicians to serve life and never to kill. The voiceless or marginalized in our society -- the poor, the frail elderly, racial minorities, millions of people who lack health insurance -- would be the first to feel pressure to die.

Q: What about competent, terminally ill people who say they really want assisted suicide?

A: Suicidal wishes among the terminally ill are no less due to treatable depression than the same wishes among the able-bodied. When their pain, depression and other problems are addressed, there is generally no more talk of suicide. If we respond to a death wish in one group of people with counseling and suicide prevention, and respond to the same wish in another group by offering them lethal drugs, we have made our own tragic choice as a society that some people's lives are objectively not worth protecting.

Q: How does cost enter into this issue?

A: In an era of cost control and managed care, patients with lingering illnesses may be branded an economic liability, and decisions to encourage death can be driven by cost. Former U.S. Solicitor General Walter Dellinger warned in urging the Supreme Court to uphold laws against assisted suicide: "The least costly treatment for any illness is lethal medication."

Q: Why are people with disabilities worried about assisted suicide?

A: Many people with disabilities have long experience of prejudicial attitudes on the part of able-bodied people, including physicians, who assume they would "rather be dead than disabled." Such prejudices could easily lead families, physicians and society to encourage death for people who are depressed and emotionally vulnerable as they adjust to life with a serious illness or disability. To speak here of a "free choice" for suicide is a dangerously misguided abstraction.

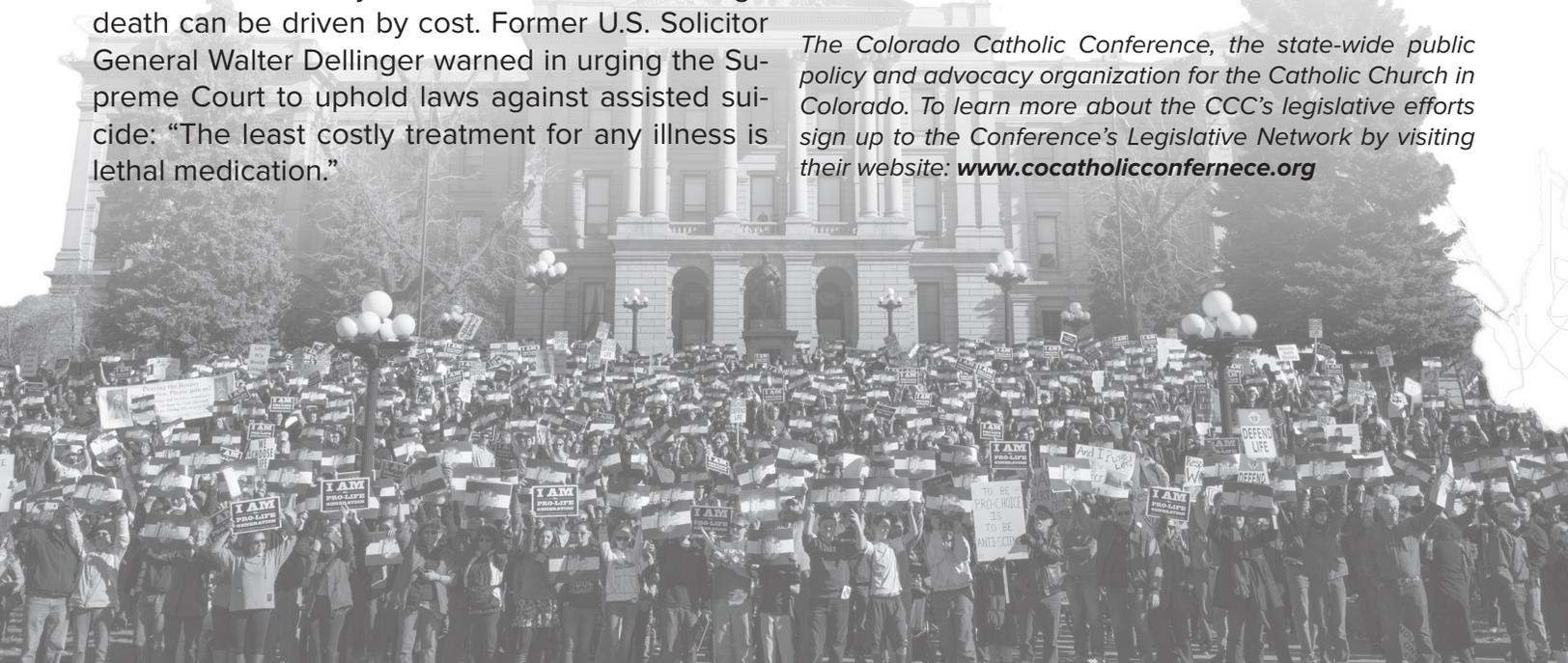
Q: What is the view of the medical profession?

A: The American Medical Association holds that "physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer." The AMA, along with the American Nurses Association, American Psychiatric Association and dozens of other medical groups, urged the Supreme Court in 1997 to uphold laws against assisted suicide, arguing that the power to assist in taking patients' lives is "a power that most health care professionals do not want and could not control."

Q: What does the Catholic Church teach?

A: Our moral tradition holds that human life is the most basic gift from a loving God -- a gift over which we have stewardship, not absolute dominion. As responsible stewards of life, we must never directly intend to cause our own death or that of anyone else.

The Colorado Catholic Conference, the state-wide public policy and advocacy organization for the Catholic Church in Colorado. To learn more about the CCC's legislative efforts sign up to the Conference's Legislative Network by visiting their website: www.cocatholicconference.org



Four Things You Can Do

TO OPPOSE PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

1. Contact your representative

Ask them to **oppose House Bill 1135**. If you need help finding your Representative please visit the Colorado Catholic Conference's website (www.cocatholicconference.org) and click on the "FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR" button.

2. Contact members of the House Public Health Care & Services Committee

NAME	PHONE NUMBER	EMAIL ADDRESS
Rep. Primavera	303-866-4667	dianne.primavera.house@state.co.us
Rep. Singer	303-866-2780	jonathan.singer.house@state.co.us
Rep. Conti	303-866-2953	kathleen.conti.house@state.co.us
Rep. Danielson	303-866-5522	jessie.danielson.house@state.co.us
Rep. Everett	303-866-2927	justin.everett.house@state.co.us
Rep. Ginal	303-866-4569	joann.ginal.house@state.co.us
Rep. Joshi	303-866-2937	janak.joshi.house@state.co.us
Rep. Keyser	303-866-2582	jon.keyser.house@state.co.us
Rep. Landgraf	303-866-2946	lois.landgraf.house@state.co.us
Rep. Melton	303-866-2919	jovan.melton.house@state.co.us
Rep. Moreno	303-866-2964	dominick.moreno.house@state.co.us
Rep. Tyler	303-866-2951	max@maxtyler.us
Rep. Windholz	303-866-2945	joann.windholz.house@state.co.us

3. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper

Please be aware that there are word limits for these types of letters so it is best to contact the newspaper or look at their website to determine what the parameters of a letter to the editor would be for a specific publication.

4. Talk to your friends and family

Please tell your colleagues, family and friends about this legislation and the dangers it poses to all Coloradans. Encourage them to take action on the issue by contacting their elected officials and asking them to oppose the legislation.

If you have any additional questions or need more information about this legislation or other legislation in Colorado please do not hesitate to contact the Colorado Catholic Conference:

ccc@cocatholicconference.org • 303-894-8808