

HEALTH & SCIENCE Assisted Suicide



Rita Marker, J.D., Executive Director of the Patient's Rights Council, noted in an addendum to the most recent Patients' Rights Council publication *Update* (2019, Vol. 33, No. 1), "Proponents of prescribed suicide are growing bolder in their attempts to broaden the reach of death on demand. For example, **what they once called "safeguards," they are now calling "barriers"**. They are committed. They are dedicated. They are working tirelessly. We must be even more committed, dedicated and hard-working. That is the only way we can protect ourselves, our loved ones, and our country."

The most recent *Update* publication noted that Kim Callinan, CEO of the national assisted suicide advocacy group Compassion & Choices (C & C) stated, "If lawmakers want to improve medical aid in dying laws, then let's address the real problem: There are too many regulatory roadblocks already!... I am merely suggesting that we drop some of the regulations that put unnecessary roadblocks in place." (McKnight's Long Term Care News, 1/1/19)

The *Update* article explained that Callinan proposes that mandated waiting periods be eliminated. She said, "By the time a patient has navigated the entire process, they have waited plenty." She also supports elimination of the "overly cumbersome reporting" which is present in most laws so that states can regulate the process. Callinan feels that this "deters doctors from practicing [assisted suicide]." She also supports extending the ability to prescribe the lethal medications to nurse practitioners to make it more accessible to patients. The *Update* article concluded, "Apparently, C & C – who helped write most of the state assisted-suicide bills and laws – backed touted safeguards simply to get the public and legislators to legalize the practice. It was a successful con job in the six states and D.C. that bought into the deception."

Steven Ertelt reported at LifeNews.com that New Jersey became the seventh state to legalize assisted suicide on March 25th. Patients' Rights Action Fund Executive Director Matt Valliere responded, "In other states where assisted suicide is legal, it has proven impossible to regulate and leaves the door wide open for abuse and coercion. The vulnerable in society: the poor, terminally ill, and people with disabilities, will be the

most negatively affected by assisted suicide. New Jersey ought to be investing in better care and support at the end of life, not enshrining this dangerous public policy into law. We call on Governor Phil Murphy to veto this bill." New Jersey Right to Life responded to the passage of this bill stating, "Senate President Sweeney replaced two members of the Committee who previously voted No on the bill with himself and Senator Scutari who is a sponsor of the bill to ensure there would be enough Yes votes for the bill to pass out of Committee. Testimony on the bill was limited to only one hour with each witness provided only two minutes to make their case. Many physicians, disability advocates and key people who signed up to give testimony did not get a chance to do so...Proponents claim that this is an issue of personal choice and that those who object to assisted suicide don't have to utilize it, but taxpayers will be forced to pay for it through New Jersey's Medicaid program which is a state taxpayer funded program. This means that all taxpayers will be complicit in funding state-sanctioned physician assisted suicide if this becomes law. Laws should not be passed for the few who want them, but consideration should be given to how it will affect the greater population, especially individuals who are most vulnerable to abuse of such a law.

"This legislation is bad public policy for New Jersey. It threatens the doctor-patient relationship because it will turn physicians who are meant to be healers into agents of death, who will act directly to cause the death of a patient. As we have seen in other states where assisted suicide is legal, health insurance companies (including Medicaid providers) who are always looking to cut costs will deny patients treatments to save and sustain their lives, but instead offer assisted suicide drugs because it is cheaper to do so. The 'so-called' safeguards in the bill are hollow and do not protect the patient. In addition, the bill grants complete immunity to everyone but the patient. It also provides third parties in the decision-making process (including those who are not 'capable' of personally communicating their wishes) and is a recipe for abuse, especially for the elderly and disabled populations."

Ertelt noted, "Compassion & Choices launched a \$1 million sustained digital video ad campaign featuring terminally ill advocates and their loved ones urging New Jersey lawmakers to pass the bill." (Steven Ertelt, LifeNews.com, 3/25/19)

We must ask, "Is New York next on Compassion & Choices list?"