

## HEALTH & SCIENCE

### Assisted Suicide Laws Dangerous to People with Disabilities



Michael Cook, editor at Bioedge.org, reported on 10/13/19 that the National Council on Disability (NCD) “released a scathing analysis of the effect of assisted suicide laws in the United States on people with disabilities. It finds that safeguards are ineffective and that there is little oversight of abuses and mistakes.” Currently eight states and the District of Columbia allow doctors to prescribe “lethal drugs to patients diagnosed with terminal illness and with a prognosis of six months or less to live, if certain procedural steps are followed.” (NYS will be considering an assisted suicide bill in the next legislative session that begins in January 2020.)

Cook stated, “Pain relief is often described as the primary motivation for seeking assisted suicide. In its report, *Assisted Suicide Laws and their Danger to People with Disabilities*, NCD responds that the most prevalent reasons offered by someone requesting assisted suicide are directly related to unmet service and support needs. These should be dealt with through new laws and more funding, says NCD, not assisted suicide.”

NCD Chairman Neil Romano commented, “Assisted suicide laws are premised on the notion of additional choice for people at the end of their lives, however, in practice, they often remove choices when the low-cost option is ending one’s life versus providing treatments to lengthen it or services and supports to improve it.” Assisted suicide has been legal in Oregon for 20 years. The NCD noted that the list of eligible conditions there has grown, and now includes disabilities that do not result in death if treated properly (arthritis, diabetes, kidney failure).

Cook continued, “[the NCD report] notes suicide contagion in states where assisted suicide is legal; as well as a loosening of existing safeguards both in states with legalized assisted suicide and states considering bills to legalize. In the report, NCD exposes the limitations of purported safeguards. It says that: Insurers have denied patients expensive, life-

sustaining medical treatment, but offered to subsidize lethal drugs for them, potentially leading patients to hasten their own deaths; Misdiagnoses of terminal disease can cause frightened patients to hasten their deaths; Though fear and depression often drive requests for assisted suicide, referral for psychological evaluation is extremely rare prior to doctors writing lethal prescriptions; Financial and emotional pressures can distort patient choice; Patients may “doctor shop” limitlessly to find a physician who will obtain a colleague’s concurrence and prescribe a lethal dose; Evidence of suicide contagion in states where assisted suicide is legal has been found in several studies.”

Chairman Romano stated, “As someone who has battled cancer and been given weeks to live and am still thriving years later, I know firsthand that well-intending doctors are often wrong. If assisted suicide is legal, lives will be lost due to mistakes, abuse, lack of information, or a lack of better options; no current or proposed safeguards can change that.”

The NCD report noted that the assisted suicide debate continues while the US is battling an opioid epidemic. “... people who depend on opioids to manage pain often find themselves treated like criminals. It may become easier to obtain a prescription to die than one to relieve pain.” The report stated that many national disability rights organizations oppose the legalization of assisted suicide. In fact, all the national groups that have taken a position are opposed.

#### Federal Palliative Care and Hospice

In October, the Healthcare Advocacy and Leadership Organization (HALO) announced their concern and opposition to the federal Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act (PCHETA). HALO supports hospice and palliative care providers who “respect the dignity and life of every patient, give honest information to patients and their families, and provide appropriate pain control and comfort measures.” American Life League reported that according to HALO, the “current federal hospice programs are plagued with fraud, poor quality care, rampant abuse, and intentionally caused deaths. HALO warns that enacting another federal hospice program would only cause more of the same issues. Additionally, HALO warns that if PCHETA becomes law, it will finance education programs to entice the public into trusting palliative care and hospice. HALO’s bottom line is that Hospice and Palliative Care Medicine “must be cleaned up before any more taxpayer funds are spent promoting it.”” (all.org, 10/18/19)

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#### ATTENTION H.S. JUNIORS & SENIORS

High school juniors and seniors including home schoolers, you have the voice, the enthusiasm, the spirit and the opportunity to speak up for the voiceless and marginalized members of the human family; the pre-born, the frail elderly and the disabled.

Please consider participating in the annual **Oratory Contest** sponsored by the Long Island Coalition for Life Educational Trust to be held at Kellenberg Memorial High School on Sunday, March 22, 2020. You will have the opportunity to express in a logical and organized way your respect for the life of every individual no matter how small or incapacitated. The first, second and third place winners will receive \$500, \$300 and \$200 respectively.

You may focus your 5-7 minute speech on one of the following topics: abortion, stem cell research/cloning, euthanasia, assisted suicide or health care rationing. The application will be in the Jan/Feb issue of *Life News* and will be on our website: [prolifeli.org](http://prolifeli.org).