



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

February 19, 2019

**Senate Bill 311
End-of-Life Option Act
(Richard E. Israel and Roger 'Pip' Moyer Act)**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: OPPOSE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in OPPOSITION of Senate Bill 311 (SB 311). The Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three (arch) dioceses serving Maryland, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders.

SB 311 would allow doctors to legally prescribe a lethal dose of controlled substances at the request of a patient who has been deemed “capable of making a medical decision” and who has received a terminal diagnosis. The Conference joins many in the faith community who oppose this legislation, not only because it violates the most basic tenet of our belief in the sacredness of life, but also because of the many dangers this legislation poses to vulnerable populations.

In a time where opioid-related overdose deaths are increasing in Maryland, (a 20 percent increase from 2017 to 2018 according to recent reports from the Maryland Department of Health), it seems woefully misconstrued to encourage the passage of legislation that would legalize a means of ending one’s life by prescribing a large dosage (typically 100 pills) of barbiturates or a compound mixture (usually morphine sulfate, Propranolol (Inderal), Diazepam (Valium), Digoxin) that a patient would self-administer.

In addition, we have many concerns about the bill which are shared by numerous other groups, including countless physicians, mental health providers, hospice nurses, pharmacists, disability rights groups, advocates for senior citizens, and others. From the perspective of the Church, however, we wish to convey our deep dismay about the message this legislation sends to those who might feel that their illness and the care they require is nothing more than a burden to their families and the rest of society. Passage of this bill will undermine societal support for communities that are currently prone to higher suicide attempt rates – young adults, adolescents, and the military community.

At the heart of our ministry to the sick, the disabled, the elderly, and those without access to adequate medical care is recognition of the Gospel call to embrace the lives of those most in need of our love, care, and compassion. There is no life that we consider not worth living, no person who does not deserve to be valued. While some may view this legislation as a response to the understandable fears about pain and loss of “dignity” that someone diagnosed with a terminal



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illness might face, we insist firmly that the answer to those fears should be a demand for medical treatment that provides adequate pain management and excellent palliative or hospice care. A terminally ill patient requesting a prescription to commit suicide deserves to be surrounded by compassion, not handed a large quantity of lethal drugs to take his or her life.

The Maryland Catholic Conference respectfully urges the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to uphold the true dignity of life by opposing SB 311.