

California's Assisted Suicide Law Likely to Hurt the Poorest and Most Vulnerable

California Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill on Monday making California the fifth state in the nation to legalize assisted suicide.

The Life Legal Defense Foundation, which is in California, had warned that the mechanism used to pass the bill violates state law.

Carol Tobias, the president of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), condemned Gov. Jerry Brown for signing a bill to legalize physician-assisted suicide, saying it "shows a blatant disregard for the lives of California's medically vulnerable citizens and sends a message to these citizens that their lives are less worthy to be lived."

"The so-called 'right-to-die' movement promotes these laws as simply 'another medical option' at the end of life, but their real goal is euthanasia on demand for any reason," Tobias warned.

As Gov. Brown prepared to sign the bill, some made a last-ditch appeal that the assisted suicide movement had been passed in a vacuum and based on ignorance.

Those who support assisted suicide "fail to mention that in only one of the four states [that have legalized it] did a bill survive expert testimony," said Jacqueline C. Harvey, Ph.D., an associate scholar at the pro-life Charlotte Lozier Institute. "Banking on ignorance and quashing evidence (or simply bypassing the legislature altogether with judicial activism) was the strategy they resorted to in three of their four victories."

The bill was passed during a special session of the California State Legislature, which was originally called to address cost savings for the state's MediCal program. NRLC warned that there are many who would be tempted to see assisted suicide as a "cost-savings" measure. It cited quotation included in a September article in the *New York Times* that was made by Dr. Aaron Kheriaty, director of the medical ethics program at the University of California, Irvine, School of Medicine: "[Kheriaty] said that low-income and underinsured patients would inevitably feel pressure to end their own lives in some cases, when the cost of continued treatment would be astronomical compared with the cost of a few lethal pills."

The California bill is modeled after the situation in Oregon, which legalized the practice 11 years ago, becoming the first state in the nation to enact doctor-prescribed suicide. Its supporters say the measures give suffering people the right to "die with dignity."

But National Right to Life warns that there are no real safeguards, and that most who die are simply suffering from depression.

"In Oregon, fewer than 6 percent of patients have been referred for psychiatric evaluation before obtaining life-ending drugs," it notes. "Rather than treat clinically depressed patients, the Oregon system, and the system that would be established by the California bill, indicates that you instead help the patients kill themselves."