

Belgium a Step Closer to Child Euthanasia

Belgium is now a step closer to introducing child euthanasia after a Senate committee voted 13-4 in favor of the proposals on Wednesday.

The bill, which extends euthanasia to children of any age suffering terminal illnesses and adults with dementia, must now clear further hurdles in the legislative process before it becomes law.

If passed, Belgium would become the first country in the world to remove the age limit, as the Netherlands already allow euthanasia but restrict it to 12-year-olds and older.

The proposed legislation would allow terminally ill children to ask to be killed if they are deemed capable of making their own decision and if their pain is "unbearable and cannot be alleviated."

Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders have expressed "deep concern" about the legislation.

"The euthanasia of fragile people, be they children or incapable, is totally inconsistent with their condition as human beings. We cannot accept a logic which will lead to the destruction of society's foundations," they say.

Anti-euthanasia campaigner and cancer doctor Benoit Beuselinck says the new law could open the door to infanticide.

"Once the possibility for euthanasia exists for children, demand is likely to rise," he says. "It's clear among adults that it is difficult to keep euthanasia within limits once the taboo of killing has fallen."

But supporters of the proposals say the practice of child

euthanasia is already going on in secret and that a change in the law would prevent discrimination against minors.

Belgium has seen a 4,620 percent rise in cases of euthanasia between 2002, when the practice was legalized, and 2011.

And recent incidents in the country highlight people wanting doctors to end their lives though they were not terminally ill.

A woman was euthanized after a sex-change operation did not meet expectations.

The same doctor euthanized a pair of deaf twins who were going blind and felt their lives weren't worth living if they couldn't see each other.

Dr. Peter Saunders, who leads the Christian Medical Fellowship, previously warned that once euthanasia is legalized, "steady escalation follows along with a change in the social conscience so that it rapidly becomes accepted as normal."