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Dear Friends,

ASSISTED SUICIDE BILL WESTMINSTER PARLIAMENT

On Wednesday 16 October Kim Leadbeater MP introduced a bill in the Westminster Parliament to permit assisted suicide, which will be voted on by MPs on the 29 November. We know that assisted suicide laws in other jurisdictions have had devastating consequences for the poor, disabled and marginalised.

With less than four weeks until MPs will debate and vote on Kim Leadbeater's bill, it's important that we all take every opportunity to warn our MPs (if possible, by arranging to meet them).

Archbishop William Nolan has asked each Deanery to have a meeting about defending the right to life for vulnerable and disabled people. Our local meeting is in St Gregory's, Wyndford, on Tuesday 12th November at 7pm. I would encourage you to attend.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols recently warned : *"No doubt the bill put before Parliament will be carefully framed, providing clear and very limited circumstances in which it would become lawful to assist, directly and deliberately, in the ending of a person's life. But please remember, the evidence from every single country in which such a law has been passed is clear: that the circumstances in which the taking of a life is permitted are widened and widened, making assisted suicide and medical killing, or euthanasia, more and more available and accepted. In this country, assurances will be given that the proposed safeguards are firm and reliable. Rarely has this been the case. This proposed change in the law may be a source of relief to some. But it will bring great fear and trepidation to many, especially those who have vulnerabilities and those living with disabilities. What is now proposed will not be the end of the story. It is a story better not begun."*

Cardinal Nichols further writes: a right to die can become a duty to die. A law which prohibits an action is a clear deterrent. A law which permits an action changes attitudes: that which is permitted is often and easily encouraged. Once assisted suicide is approved by the law, a key protection of human life falls away. Pressure mounts on those who are nearing death, from others or even from themselves, to end their life in order to take away a perceived burden of care from their family, for the avoidance of pain, or for the sake of an inheritance.

I know that, for many people, there is profound fear at the prospect of prolonged suffering and loss of dignity. Yet such suffering itself can be eased. Part of this debate, then, must be the need and duty to enhance palliative care and hospice provision, so that there can genuinely be, for all of us, the prospect of living our last days in the company of loved ones and caring medical professionals. This is truly dying with dignity. Indeed, the radical change in the law now being proposed risks bringing about for all medical professionals a slow change from a duty to care to a duty to kill.

We know, only too well, that suffering can bring people to a most dreadful state of mind, even driving them to take their own lives, in circumstances most often when they lack true freedom of mind and will, and so bear no culpability. But this proposed legislation is quite different. It seeks to give a person of sound will and mind the right to act in a way that is clearly contrary to a fundamental truth: our life is not our own possession, to dispose of as we feel fit. This is not a freedom of choice we can take for ourselves without undermining the foundations of trust and shared dignity on which a stable society rests."

The Westminster Health secretary Wes Streeting comments:

"I worry about coercion and the risk that the right to die feels like a duty to die on the part of particularly older people.

"I am also worried about the slippery slope, and the Canadian experience is not a happy experience as far as I am concerned. I am having to weigh those considerations up very carefully."

Associated Press in Canada observed that Ontario's chief coroner issued several reports on Wednesday 16 October highlighting cases where Canadians were euthanised not because of the illnesses which made them eligible, but 'other factors including an "unmet social need"... such as isolation and fears of homelessness.

Associated Press 'found doctors and nurses privately struggling with euthanasia requests from vulnerable people whose suffering might be addressed by money, social connections or adequate housing.'

Dr Ramona Coelho, a doctor on the expert committee reviewing euthanasia deaths in Ontario said: *"We've been gaslit for so many years when we raised fears about people getting MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying) because they were poor, disabled or socially isolated."*

The Canadian Association for Palliative Medicine has issued a new position statement, opposing *“any change in the law that could lead to the supply or administration of lethal medications to deliberately end a person’s life,”* citing concerns about protection of vulnerable, frail, elderly, disabled and terminally ill people, palliative care under-funding, and doctor-patient trust.

On Wednesday 24th October , the Welsh Parliament (the Senedd) debated and voted down a motion calling on the Welsh Government to support the principles of “assisted dying”, and to support the Westminster Parliament to introduce such a law in England and Wales.

Labour First Minister Eluned Morgan and Health Secretary Jeremy Miles were among 26 members of the 60-seat Senedd to vote against the motion; 19 voted for it, nine abstained and six were absent. The vote was not legislative but demonstrated that assisted suicide campaigners have failed to make their case, and that opposition to a change in the law exists across the political spectrum.

Delyth Jewell, Plaid Cymru member for South Wales East, said: My fear with this motion – well, my terror, really – is not so much with how it will begin as with how it will end. There are safeguards in what is being proposed in Westminster, indeed there are, but every precedent we see internationally shows that no safeguard is sacrosanct; the experiences of Canada, the Netherlands, Belgium and some states in the US show what can so easily, so inevitably, happen.”

And then on 27th October in a significant open letter to the Observer, nearly 50 leading *“teachers and practitioners of law”* expressed *“serious misgivings about the proposal to legalise physician-assisted suicide for the terminally ill... The law reports are littered with cases of undue influence and duress, and legalisation would inevitably expose the most vulnerable to that risk.”*

Act Now - Contact your MP

The Scottish Catholic Parliamentary Office provide excellent lobbying advice via the link <https://rcpolitics.org/assisted-suicide-contact-mps/>

Whether or not this dangerous proposal becomes law is for MPs to decide. This is why it is vital you contact your MP as soon as possible, expressing your concerns about Kim Leadbeater’s proposal. The most effective way to do this is to meet with your MPs at their local surgeries. But if this is not possible you can use the very handy tool (Write to Them) available on the Parliamentary Office website. With less than four weeks to go please do your part and contact your MP.

With best wishes and prayers

Cesard Mitchell, S.S