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Public Health Committee
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Legislative Office Building, Room 1D

HB 6645, *“An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients”*

My name is Michael C. Culhane and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference (Conference). For the record, the Conference is the public policy office of the Catholic Bishops of Connecticut and I am here today to urge the members of the Public Health Committee to reject HB 6645, *“An Act Concerning Compassionate Aid in Dying for Terminally Ill Patients”*.

The Conference opposes this legislation – not only because it is an affront to the teachings of the Church – but because we join many *other non-religious* organizations representing the medical, hospice, elderly and disability communities who have also publicly opposed this bill. Any attempt by the proponents of this measure to characterize this issue as “religious” is clearly an effort by them to detract from the many serious problems related to this legislation on assisted suicide.

The Connecticut legislature should reject this concept based on the public policy that it established in 2012 when the Repeal of the Death Penalty was debated and passed. One of the strongest arguments made in our effort to abolish this law was that if just one innocent person could be saved, then the repeal would be justified. Even President Obama promoted this “view of life” in the aftermath of the Newton tragedy when he stated, during his White House remarks on “Gun Violence,” on January 16, 2013, that “... if there’s even one life that can be saved, then we’ve got an obligation to try...” to do so.

The proponents of this bill talk about end of life issues and I would make three very brief comments: (1) Doctors admit that the exact end of one's life is unknowable, (2) there are volumes of examples of terminally ill patients who, at the end of life, have gone into remission and subsequently have lived long significant and productive lives and (3) I would like to speak personally – and from my experience – on this subject. In 2000, I was diagnosed with Stage 4 kidney cancer and had surgery at Sloane-Kettering in New York. A year later, in 2001, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and had surgery at that same wonderful hospital. And here I am – twelve/thirteen years later – and I have beaten the odds. But, for those who are sick and suffering, our efforts must be directed at research and programs to enhance palliative and hospice care, not on concentrating on ways and methods to promote physician-assisted suicide.

So my concluding point is simply this: we as a Society must emphasize, to quote President Obama, “our obligation” to preserve “even one life”. I believe that this bill is bad public policy, it places the State squarely in the middle of a private matter – where it should not be – and I urge the Committee to reject HB 6645.