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Delaware Gov. John Carney is pictured May 30, 2021. Carney, a Democrat, vetoed House Bill 140 Sept. 20, 2024, which would have legalized physician-assisted suicide in the state. "I am fundamentally and morally opposed’ to someone taking their own life,” he said in a statement issued the day of his veto. (OSV News/Ken Cedeno, Reuters)

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WILMINGTON, Del. — September 24, 2024
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Delaware Gov. John Carney Sept. 20 vetoed House Bill 140, turning back legislative efforts to make legal physician-assisted suicide in the state.

"And although I understand not everyone shares my views, I am fundamentally and morally opposed to state law enabling someone, even under tragic and painful circumstances, to take their own life," Carney, a Democrat, said in a statement.

In a June political maneuver that enabled supporters to rescind the Senate vote from the previous week that defeated the assisted suicide bill, the measure passed in a new vote with 11 Democrats voting in favor of it in the 21-member state Senate. It went to Carney's desk from there.

The Catholic Diocese of Wilmington was among numerous organizations that opposed the bill, which was similar to one defeated earlier in the year in Maryland. The Wilmington Diocese includes churches, schools and organizations in the nine counties of the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

"I want to express my sincere appreciation to Governor Carney for vetoing HB140 that would legalize physician-assisted suicide in Delaware," Bishop William E. Koenig of Wilmington said.

"I also want to thank the thousands of Catholics and others of good will who helped with their prayers and efforts to protect the elderly, ill and disabled of our community," he said. "All human life is created in the image and likeness of God and must be protected, especially the most vulnerable."

HB 140, sponsored by Rep. Paul Baumbach, would have allowed terminally ill Delaware residents to end their own lives with the help of a medical professional. The measure passed the state House of Representatives on April 18 on a nearly party-line vote before barely making it through the Senate in June.

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"During my time as Governor, and since this legislation was first introduced, I have consistently opposed a state law that would allow physician-assisted suicide," Carney stated.

"I still don't believe a firm consensus has been reached on what is a very difficult issue — in Delaware or nationally," he said. "Last year, the American Medical Association reaffirmed its view that physician-assisted suicide is 'fundamentally incompatible with a physician's role as healer.'"

The physician-assisted suicide legislation in Delaware has had numerous pushes in the last several years, including 2022 when it also passed through the House committee but was never offered for a full vote. It was removed from the House agenda that May.

Carney signaled his opposition as the bill was being considered in January 2022.

"I believe enabling physicians to facilitate suicide crosses a boundary that I'm just not comfortable crossing," he said at the time in a statement to The Dialog, Wilmington's diocesan newspaper.

The Delaware Catholic Advocacy Network said in June HB 140 has "serious flaws" that would endanger the elderly, mentally ill and disabled and could result in elder abuse, insurance fraud and an increase in the overall suicide rate. It also would fundamentally change the legal approach to medical ethics, medical practice and health-care decision-making in Delaware, the group said.