News

Sign that reads: "No assisted suicide"

A person is pictured in a file photo holding a sign against physician-assisted suicide. The Illinois Legislature Oct. 31 passed a bill that would legalize medically assisted dying. (OSV News/Kevin J. Parks, Catholic Review)



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Illinois Catholics and pro-life advocates have turned their sights on Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker's office after the state Senate in the early hours of Oct. 31 narrowly voted to legalize physician-assisted suicide.

The measure had already passed the state House in May, but by the time the spring session ended, both houses did not have consensus.

The bill's passage puts Illinois on track to being the 12th state, plus the District of Columbia, to have such a law. He has 60 days to act.

"With all the assaults on human dignity and the growing number of vulnerable people we see every day, sadly the leaders and members of the General Assembly who voted for this, offer us suicide as its response," said the Catholic Conference of Illinois in a statement.

The conference, which represents the Catholic Church at the state capitol in Springfield, said it asked the governor "not only to veto this bill in totality, but also to address humanely the reasons why some view assisted suicide as their only option and to heed the impact of similar legislation on other states and nations."

Robert Gilligan, the conference's executive director, said his office is planning next steps.

"We're talking about what we need to do to reach out to him, what we should do to make sure that we still have one, final, chance at stopping this from becoming law," he said.

Gilligan told OSV News the conference is very much focused on the task "for however long it takes."

Pritzker has 60 days to act — sign, veto or leave untouched, which results in automatic enactment — after receiving the bill.

Illinois Right to Life President Mary Kate Zander urged subscribers of the group's newsletters to contact Pritzker's office.

"We cannot give up yet. There is still time to defeat this horrible bill," said Zander, who also made a plea for prayers "for our legislators, for our governor, and for our state."

The "End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act" allows for mentally competent people deemed by a physician to have six months or less to live to receive prescriptions to end their lives.

The bill also states: "Actions taken in accordance with this Act do not, for any purposes, constitute suicide, assisted suicide, euthanasia, mercy killing, homicide, murder, manslaughter, elder abuse or neglect, or any other civil or criminal violation under the law." It also maintains suicide is not to be listed as the cause of death; instead it would be the original diagnosed illness determined to be terminal.

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The bill was introduced by Sen. Linda Holmes of Aurora, just west of Chicago, in the 2025 spring legislative session. Holmes said she had a personal stake in the proposal.

"My father died of lung cancer when he was 49. And I mean, it's a horrendous way to watch somebody die. I mean, it's horrible. It's painful. There's a lot of suffering," she told OSV News days after introducing the measure in January.

But the Catholic Conference of Illinois argued that making suicide legal in any form could have a negative impact on "young impressionable minds." It referenced Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics from 2023 that show suicide is "the second-leading cause of death" for young people between ages 10 and 34.

The conference also warned of "suicide contagion," which they said the National Institutes of Health have labeled a real risk to young people who are exposed to it.

"It defies common sense for our state to enact a 9-8-8 suicide hotline, increase funding for suicide prevention programs and then pass a law that, based on the experience of other jurisdictions, results in more suicide," the conference's statement said.

Medically assisted suicide is legal in Canada and 11 of 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C. The New York state Senate passed the Medical Aid in Dying Act on June 9; Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul, who is Catholic, has not yet signed the bill.

Assisted suicide and/or euthanasia is legal in countries that include Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

British and French Catholics struggle to turn the tide on assisted suicide