ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we begin our Lenten journey marked with prayer, fasting and almsgiving, I am writing to let you know that on Ash Wednesday a Senate committee passed a bill, Senate Bill 9, that would legalize assisted suicide in Illinois. This would make it legal for a physician to prescribe an array of lethal drugs to a person diagnosed with a terminal disease who requests to end his or her life. In addition to asking you to offer your Lenten sacrifices to protect life, I ask that you take action by writing, calling or e-mailing your state elected official to vote "NO" on this legislation. There is also legislation pending in the House, House Bill 1328 as you will see at www.ilcatholic.org or by calling 217-528-9200.

The involvement of insurance companies is alarming. In fact, in states with legalized suicide, there are documented cases of people being denied life-saving medical treatment by insurance companies in lieu of the much cheaper option of life-ending drugs. The poor and those with disabilities are particularly in jeopardy as they are the most vulnerable to such abuses. Every major national organization that represents people with disabilities is opposed to assisted suicide. There is no way to prevent the vulnerable from being coerced or intimidated to end their lives once this assisted suicide is legal. There are simply too many documented cases of the vulnerable being coerced or intimidated into ending their life.

Proponents argue that this legislation will end suffering at the end of life. We all agree that no one should needlessly suffer or have to watch a loved one experience unnecessary pain and suffering. Fortunately, there are now effective ways to make a person more comfortable at the end of life through palliative care, which utilizes physician-led teams to care for the whole person – physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually – to relieve the symptoms and the stress related to serious illness and side effects of treatment.

The American Medical Association (AMA) has summed up the case against assisted suicide well: "Physician assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would provide serious societal risks."

Assisted suicide is not the compassionate solution for those who are suffering. Through palliative care, expanded access to mental health care, and stronger family and community support, providers and families are finding better ways to accompany these people compassionately that shows love and respect for the dignity each human life.

Please go to www.ilcatholic.org/take-action or call 217-528-9200 to find out how to contact your local elected official to tell them to vote NO on SB 9 and HB 1328.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Blase Card. Cupich
Archbishop of Chicago