

The Pilot

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Four steps in the final four days to defeat assisted suicide

Regular readers of The Pilot and Cardinal-SeansBlog.org are aware of the many reasons we in the Church oppose assisted suicide and urge a vote of “No on Question 2.” Our faith tells us that suicide is always a tragedy and should never be presented as a “compassionate solution.” The medical community and advocacy groups for the disabled have pointed out the lack of safeguards and other flaws in Question 2. Others oppose Question 2 because they think laws involving life and death should be discussed in the legislature, not through a ballot initiative process.



Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap.

Polks show that support for Question 2 has dropped significantly. There are three principal reasons for this. First, nearly all newspaper editorials have endorsed the “No on Question 2” position, including the Boston Herald, Worcester Telegram and Gazette, Lowell Sun, New Bedford Standard Times, Salem News, Fitchburg Sentinel & Enterprise, Cape Cod Times, The Pilot and others. Most newspapers have also included well-written Op-eds from doctors, disability-rights advocates and regular citizens persuasively stating why Question 2 is wrong for Massachusetts.

Second, the television and radio commercials produced by the Coalition Against Physician Assisted Suicide (CAPAS) have been effective at pointing out the significant flaws in Question 2, particularly the fact that it does not require a patient considering assisted suicide to consult with a psychiatrist, palliative care expert, or even a family member. The commercials have also emphasized that these lethal prescriptions could be picked up at a local pharmacy and would involve ingesting 100 capsules of Seconal, all at once, and without a doctor present. Voters have been horrified by those facts and agree that a death like that would not be “dignified.”

Third, and perhaps most importantly, “word of mouth” from people like you has been tremendously important. The heartfelt concern of a friend or family member will always be more

memorable and persuasive than even the best television advertisements or newspaper editorials. Thank you for your outreach to family members, friends, neighbors and work colleagues on this issue.

It is projected to be a close vote on Question 2. To defeat assisted suicide, we especially need to win the “word of mouth” campaign over the final four days. I'd be grateful for your help. Here are 4 specific steps that I think are critical:

(1) Vote and help others to get to the polls. Voting is a privilege and a right, as it is a direct way we participate in helping to shape our society to protect the vulnerable. Every vote counts, especially on this issue. Please also reach out to friends and family members that don't drive and ask if they need help getting to their polling locations.

(2) Personal outreach to at least 10 people through phone or direct email. A phone call or a personally addressed email from you could be the first time someone hears about this important issue. Please share with them your concerns about Question 2 and ask them to think about it before voting on Tuesday.

For an email message or a personal phone call, you may want to say something like, “I'm contacting you because I am concerned about Question 2. It promotes suicide, instead of palliative care, as a solution to those suffering from terminal illness. Question 2 has many flaws, such as no required consultation with a psychiatrist, pain management expert, or even family members. Doctors, including the American Medical Association and the Massachusetts Medical Society, urge a vote of “NO on Question 2” and state that terminal diagnoses are often wrong and shouldn't be used to make life and death decisions. I'd be grateful if you considered this information before you cast your own vote on Question 2. Thanks very much! P.S. More information is available at www.SuicideIsAlwaysATragedy.org and www.StopAssistedSuicide.org.”

(3) A message to your contacts through Facebook, Twitter or a general email. The power of electronic media to reach hundreds and even thousands of people at once is an amazing technical advance. That is one of the reasons I

have utilized my Twitter account (@Cardinal-Sean) to share my own messages about assisted suicide in the hope that all my Twitter followers will “retweet” (forward) my messages instantly to their followers. In this way, one frequently retweeted message has the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of individuals. If you are on Twitter, please send out your own messages or retweet mine. If you are on Facebook, please like the archdiocesan Facebook page and then “like” its messages on assisted suicide. If you are not presently on Facebook or Twitter, please consider sending an email to all your contacts.

For a short Twitter message (which is limited to 140 characters), you may want to write something like, “Question 2 is flawed. Please join me in ‘Voting No on 2.’ www.StopAssistedSuicide.org. Please retweet.”

(4) Pray for the grace of understanding, courage and discernment. It is a good practice that people of faith pray in the days leading up to any important decision, including casting their votes. Ask God to increase your understanding on difficult issues, to increase your courage if any of your votes are a hard choice, and to help identify those you should reach out to with your concerns and messages on the issue of assisted suicide. God wants to be present with us at all moments of our life.

Please understand the impact each of us can have individually and collectively when we share our views in a civil and respectful manner. Let's choose to grow old in a society that views our cares and needs with true compassion, offering genuine support in our final days. The choices we make on Election Day will decide whether this is the kind of caring society we will leave to future generations. Please join me on Election Day to stop assisted suicide by voting “No on Question 2.”

The Archdiocese of Boston has developed an educational website on the Church's teachings on end of life issues, www.SuicideIsAlwaysATragedy.org. The archdiocese is also part of a large coalition of groups from other faiths, from the medical community, and from disabilities rights groups that are advocating a vote of “No on Question 2.” The coalition's website is www.StopAssistedSuicide.org.