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Press Release

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<http://www.ncpd.org/pressreleases.htm>

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National Catholic Partnership on Disability Urges Opposition to Washington State's *Initiative 1000*, the "*Death with Dignity Act*"

Washington, DC — The Governance Board of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) issued a statement today urging the citizens of Washington State to VOTE “NO” on Initiative 1000. Although labeled the “Death with Dignity Act,” Initiative 1000 actually authorizes physicians to prescribe lethal doses of narcotics so their terminal patients can kill themselves.

Oregon is presently the only state that allows physician-assisted suicide. In 1994, voters enacted that State's “Death with Dignity Act” which legalized physician-assisted suicide for competent, terminally ill patients. In contrast, Washington voters in 1991 narrowly rejected a ballot initiative which, had it passed, would have permitted a form of physician-assisted suicide.

The present Washington ban on assisted suicide, enacted in 1975, was upheld by the Supreme Court against a constitutional challenge eleven years ago. In a well-funded campaign, suicide advocates have now targeted Washington's ban as a way to jump-start their national agenda.

Ballot Initiative 1000, called the “Death with Dignity Act” after the Oregon statute on which it is patterned, would overturn Washington's ban on physician-assisted suicide. Suicide advocates hope to obtain a symbolic victory that will give momentum to their efforts in others states. As a major supporter of the initiative, former Washington Governor Booth Gardner, has made clear,

though Initiative 1000 is now limited to patients with terminal conditions, the aim is ultimately to include disabled people as well.

NCPD's opposition to Initiative 1000 is based on its conclusions that Initiative 1000: (1) is cynically misleading, as it requires death certificates to list the patient's terminal condition rather than the lethal narcotics as the cause of death; (2) substitutes illusory safeguards and lethal medication for compassionate care; (3) does not mandate family involvement, so that families may never know that their terminally ill loved ones actually committed suicide with their physicians' assistance; and (4) aims ultimately to permit people with disabilities to kill themselves, which the Governance Board emphatically rejects as a response to disability.

NCPD Board member Jacques Mistrot, M.D. further explains, "NCPD represents the concerns of over 14 million U.S. Catholics. Through its statement, the Board defends their lives, noting that truly compassionate care, relief of pain and suffering, may become less available, and therefore terminally ill and disabled patients will feel more marginalized, with no other alternative but assisted suicide. This is neither compassionate care nor real choice and is beneath the dignity of any civilized society."

Legalizing assisted suicide abandons the higher goal of truly compassionate care for the dying. Assisted suicide eliminates the patient, not the pain. The NCPD Board represents people who live with challenges but love life. The Board urges voters of Washington State to discard Initiative 1000, not the lives of terminally ill patients and potentially the lives of people with disabilities as well.

NCPD Chair-Elect, Professor Stephen Mikochik, urges the voters of Washington "to vote 'NO' on Initiative 1000 because, rather than providing terminally ill patients death with dignity, it presumes that they are only dignified when dead."

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Our Mission:

Rooted in Gospel values that affirm the dignity of every person, the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) works collaboratively to ensure meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of the life of the Church and society.

**See attached file,
or see NCPD's website for a copy of the full statement at
www.ncpd.org**