



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 16, 2024

House Bill 403

**End-of-Life Option Act (The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings and the Honorable
Shane E. Pendergrass Act)**

House Health and Government Operations Committee and Judiciary

Position: Unfavorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 403 would allow licensed physicians to legally prescribe lethal medication at the request of a patient who has been deemed "capable of making a medical decision" and has a terminal illness. The bill defines a terminal illness as a medical condition that, within a reasonable medical judgment, involves a prognosis for an individual that likely will result in the individual's death within 6 months. The individual must have the ability to self-administer the medication.

At the heart of the Catholic Church's ministry to the sick, the disabled, the elderly, and those without access to adequate medical care is the recognition of the Gospel's call to embrace the lives of those most in need of our love, care, and compassion. There is no life that we consider not worth living, and no person who does not deserve to be valued. While some may view this legislation as a response to the understandable fears about pain and loss of "dignity" that someone diagnosed with a terminal illness might face, we insist firmly that the answer to those fears should be a demand for medical treatment that provides adequate pain management and excellent palliative or hospice care. A terminally ill patient requesting a prescription to commit suicide deserves to be surrounded by compassion, not handed lethal drugs to take their own life.

In addition, we have many concerns about the bill which are shared by numerous other groups, including countless physicians, mental health providers, hospice nurses, pharmacists, disability rights groups, advocates for senior citizens, and others. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, however, we wish to convey our deep dismay about the message this legislation sends

to those who might feel that their illness and the care they require is nothing more than a burden to their families and the rest of society. The passage of this bill will undermine societal support for communities that are currently prone to higher suicide attempt rates – young adults, adolescents, and the military community. It is also important to note that in jurisdictions where similar legislation has been introduced, once enacted, the effort immediately begins to expand who can qualify for assisted suicide. The MCC joins many in the faith community who oppose this legislation, not only because it violates the most basic tenet of our belief in the sacredness of life, but also because of the many dangers this legislation poses to vulnerable populations.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for an unfavorable report on **HB 403**.

Thank you for your consideration.