

New Mexico assisted suicide bill spurs call to pray

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SANTA FE, N.M. (BP)—A New Mexico assisted suicide bill that has been described as “devastating” to the sanctity of life is drawing opposition from Baptists and other groups in the state.

Two of the bill’s most controversial provisions—suicide prescriptions via telemedicine and a broad definition of terminal illness—were removed Jan. 28 by a committee of the New Mexico House of Representatives. But the legislation still would allow non-physicians to prescribe lethal doses of medication and could endanger vulnerable members of society, according to the Family Policy Alliance of New Mexico, a partner organization of Focus on the Family.

Jay McCollum, chairman of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico’s Christian Life Committee, asked Christians everywhere to make New Mexico’s assisted suicide bill “a matter of prayer and fasting.” He asked New Mexicans to visit, email and call their state legislators and ask them to oppose the bill.

“It’s really sad. This is a very devastating bill to the sanctity of life and the teachings of Scripture,” said McCollum, pastor of First Baptist Church in Gallup, N.M., and a member of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

Lethal doses to terminally ill patients

The legislation—H.B. 90—would permit nurse practitioners and physician assistants to prescribe lethal doses of medication to patients with

prognoses of six months or less to live. It would require a two-day waiting period between the time a lethal prescription is written and when it can be fulfilled—shorter than the waiting periods in other states where assisted suicide is legal, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported.

Initially, H.B. 90 allowed lethal medication to be prescribed via telemedicine, and it defined terminal illness broadly as an ailment that would cause death in the “foreseeable future.” Both of those provisions were eliminated by the House Health and Human Services Committee before it approved the measure on a 4-3 vote, the Family Policy Alliance said.

Despite the amendments, H.B. 90 “remains fatally flawed,” said Stephanie Curry, the Family Policy Alliance’s public policy manager.

“Even with the committee’s amendments, House Bill 90 continues to lack many ‘safeguards’ found in other states,” Curry said in a news release. “It would still allow non-physicians to determine mental capacity and to prescribe life-ending medication, and nothing in the bill protects ill and vulnerable New Mexicans from abuse and coercion from predatory family members and profit-driven insurance companies.”

Next, the bill will go to another House committee, then to the House floor and on to the New Mexico Senate. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham supports the measure.

Vince Torres, executive director of the Family Policy Alliance, said, “There is little hope of stopping the bill in the House, though the vote on the floor will likely be closer than some expect. ... Should it pass the House, there is still hope that the bill will fail to pass the Senate. In 2017, the bill failed by two votes and the overwhelming majority of those members are still serving.”

The Patients Rights Council, a group that opposes assisted suicide

legislation across the United States, pointed to what it sees as several flaws of New Mexico's proposed legislation, including:

- "Government bureaucrats and profit-driven health insurance programs could cut costs by denying payment for treatment that patients need and want, while approving payment for less costly assisted suicide deaths." That has occurred in Oregon and California, the council said.
- "Even if the patient is severely depressed, has a mental illness, or is intellectually impaired, there is no need to provide counseling to address those conditions. Such patients are required to be referred to mental health professionals only to determine that they have the 'capacity' to understand what they are requesting."
- "The bill requires that the underlying condition with which the patient was diagnosed be listed on the death certificate as the cause of death—not the lethal overdose of drugs."

Assisted suicide is legal in seven states and Washington, D.C., according to the Associated Press.

At least four Southern Baptist Convention resolutions have opposed assisted suicide since 1992. Most recently, a 2015 resolution noted the legalization of "physician-assisted suicide in several states" and affirmed "the dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages of development, from conception to natural death."