

Second Thoughts

People with Disabilities Opposing the Legalization of Assisted Suicide

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Disability Rights Group Challenges Language for Assisted Suicide Ballot Measure as "Misleading, Inaccurate, and Euphemistic"

(Boston, MA) – On Thursday, May 17, 2012, Massachusetts voters including members of the disability rights group Second Thoughts filed a challenge before the Supreme Judicial Court regarding the proposed ballot language for the measure that, if approved, would legalize assisted suicide in the state.

"The ballot language is clearly misleading," said Second Thoughts director John Kelly of Boston. "We want the voters of Massachusetts to know exactly what they are voting on this November," he said.

The petition asks the Supreme Judicial Court to remand the language to Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley and Secretary of State William Galvin with the requirement that they amend the language for clarity and accuracy.

"The ballot language repeats the problems of the bill itself," said Second Thoughts member Paul Spooner of Taunton. "The title is euphemistic, with the word 'medication' twisted beyond recognition. People will be led to believe that the measure is about palliative care, when it is about taking a lethal overdose -- in other words, poison. Why not just call the act by its common and legal name, 'physician-assisted suicide?'"

"The way 'terminally-ill' is used in the description is clearly misleading," said Kelly, "people will be encouraged to assume that being 'terminally ill' is a biological fact, rather than a human guess."

"People with disabilities are very familiar with so-called terminal diagnoses," said Second Thoughts member John Norton of Florence. "Everyone knows someone who has outlived their terminal diagnosis -- I was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease as a teenager; I'm alive and well fifty years later. The ballot language misleads by implying that a 'terminally-ill' diagnosis actually leads to death within six months. Instead, it should say 'diagnosed as terminal' or something similar in terms of accuracy."

"And what about choice?," asked Spooner. "There are no safeguards to protect patients from having the poison given to them by an heir or abusive caretaker. No witnesses are required under the law, so if someone else were to administer the drugs, who would know?"

The language submitted by the Attorney General Martha Coakley and Secretary of State is:

Title: Prescribing Medication to End Life [11-12] - Petition G

A YES VOTE would enact the proposed law allowing a physician licensed in Massachusetts to prescribe medication, at the request of a terminally-ill patient meeting certain conditions, to end that person's life.

Second Thoughts has taken a leading role in opposing the ballot measure, and has been featured in the Boston Sunday Globe Magazine, the Wall Street Journal, and on local TV and radio.

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