

TO THE VOTERS OF NEW ZEALAND

AT THE UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTION, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO VOTE IN A BINDING REFERENDUM ON THE END OF LIFE CHOICE ACT 2019. WE, THE UNDERSIGNED RELIGIOUS LEADERS, WISH TO SHARE WITH YOU OUR GRAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THE FINAL FORM OF THIS ACT.

We speak out of our extensive experience of caring for the dying. We know the effectiveness of compassionate end of life palliative care – care that is able to address not just the physical suffering of people who are dying, but also their emotional, spiritual and psychological suffering, as well as that of whānau and friends.

Medical practices that are part of good end-of-life care – ceasing treatment, Do Not Resuscitate Orders, Advanced Care Directives and turning off life support – are already legal and part of our health care choices and are not part of this proposed law.

The referendum question is not about the desirability of some form of ‘assisted dying’. Rather, we are being asked to vote on a specific piece of legislation – the End of Life Choice Act. The key consideration for all of us is the robustness and safety of this Act. **Our concerns are about the lack of safeguards in the Act and the dangers it would present.**

We note that the Act differs in the quality of its processes and safeguards from other laws overseas:

- The Act is not just designed for a small number of hard cases. It is broader than laws in Victoria and the United States because it allows both assisted suicide and euthanasia.
- This is not an Act of ‘last resort’ – there is no requirement to try effective treatments or palliative care. There is also no corresponding right in the proposed law for people to access palliative care.
- People will be able to access an assisted death without being in any physical pain. Overseas statistics show people choose assisted death primarily out of a fear of being a burden and/or being disabled.¹
- The Act does not require a patient to discuss their decision with a family member or other significant person. All eligible persons, 18 years and over, could choose an assisted death without family knowing.
- There is no mandatory psychological assessment or effective screening for depression. Research shows that requests for an assisted death are commonly influenced by depression², something that is extremely difficult to detect and often mistaken for ‘appropriate sadness’.
- The NZ Medical Association and Hospice NZ, who oppose the Act,³ share concerns that it lacks processes enabling clinicians to be confident a person is making their request free of pressure from others.
- The two doctor ‘safeguard’ is weak; neither of the doctors need to have met the person previously.
- There is no mandatory stand-down period as there is in other countries - under the Act, a person could be dead less than 4 days after diagnosis.
- Unlike laws overseas, there is no requirement for independent observers or witnesses at any stage.
- The Act does not require a person to be assessed for competency at the time when the lethal dose is being administered, as is the case with laws overseas.

The referendum is binding, meaning the Act cannot be changed - it will be enacted in its current form.

We are also concerned that the practice of assisted suicide and euthanasia will become normalised over time, leading to a broadening of the criteria for eligibility as seen overseas. There is also evidence showing that people choose assisted death because of a lack of adequate care options.⁴ There is a risk this will also happen in New Zealand, especially because effective palliative care is not yet universally available to all.

We acknowledge the importance of exercising freedom of choice. At the same time there is a need to balance individual choice with the common good of society. On balance, we believe that the significant weaknesses and dangers of the Act strongly outweigh the benefits that supporters of euthanasia seek.

Even those who favour some form of assisted death have many reasons to Vote NO to the End of Life Choice Act.

Archbishop Philip Richardson	Primate, Senior Bishop of the New Zealand Pakeha Dioceses and Bishop of Diocese of Waikato & Taranaki	Archbishop Don Tamihere	Primate, Pihopa o Aotearoa and Pihopa o Te Tairāwhiti
Bishop Jay Behan	Church of Confessing Anglicans, Aotearoa New Zealand	Rev Setaita Taumoepeau K. Veikune	President, Methodist Church of New Zealand
Pastor Steve Burgess	Regional Director, C3 Churches Pacific	Pastor Adam White	Leader, New Life Churches of New Zealand
Commissioner Mark Campbell	Territorial Commander, Salvation Army, New Zealand Territory	Bishop Mark Whitfield	Lutheran Church of New Zealand
Bishop Patrick Dunn	President of the NZ Catholic Bishops Conference; Catholic Diocese of Auckland	Bishop Ross Bay	Anglican Diocese of Auckland
Dr Mustafa Farouk QSM	President, The Federation of Islamic Associations of NZ (FIANZ)	Bishop Steven Benford	Anglican Diocese of Dunedin
Rev Tavita Joseph Filemoni	General Secretary, Wesleyan Samoan Methodist Church of New Zealand & Australia	Bishop Peter Carrell	Anglican Diocese of Christchurch
Charles Hewlett	National Leader of the Baptist Churches of NZ	Cardinal John Dew	Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington
Rev. Brett Jones	National Superintendent (Acting), Wesleyan Methodist Church of NZ	Bishop Michael Dooley	Catholic Diocese of Dunedin
Right Reverend Fakaofu Kaio	Moderator, The Presbyterian Church in New Zealand	Bishop Justin Duckworth	Anglican Diocese of Wellington
Metropolitan Myron	New Zealand Greek Orthodox Church	Pastor Max Faletutulu	Senior Pastor, Titahi Bay Community Church, Wellington
Rev Dr Stuart Lange	National Director, New Zealand Christian Network	Bishop Michael Gielen	Catholic Diocese of Auckland - Auxiliary
Pastor David MacGregor	National Director, Vineyard Churches Aotearoa NZ; Senior Pastor, Grace Vineyard Church Christchurch	Bishop Andrew Hedge	Anglican Diocese of Waiaapu
Rev Andrew Marshall	National Director, Alliance Churches of New Zealand	Bishop Stephen Lowe	Catholic Diocese of Hamilton
Pastor Peter Mortlock	Senior Pastor, City Impact Churches of NZ	Bishop Steve Maina	Anglican Diocese of Nelson
		Pastor Kaio Mamea	The Light of All Nations Church, Wellington
		Bishop Paul Martin SM	Catholic Diocese of Christchurch
		Bishop Te Kitohi Pikaahu	Pihopatanga o Te Taitokerau
		Bishop Waitohiariki Quayle	Pihopatanga o Te Upoko o Te Ika
		Rt Revd Dr Eleanor Sanderson	Assistant Anglican Bishop of Wellington
		Bishop Richard Wallace	Pihopatanga o Te Waipounamu
		Rev Brian Walsh	Local Administrator, Catholic Diocese of Palmerston North

Authorised by Archbishop Philip Richardson, 566 Mangorei Road, New Plymouth

¹ See Oregon Death with Dignity 2019 Data Summary, page 12. <http://tiny.cc/Oregon2019>

² See, for example, Chochinov HM, Wilson KG, and Enns M. et al. Desire for death in the terminally ill. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1995 152:1185-1191.

³ See <https://www.nzma.org.nz/news/an-important-choice-end-of-life-choice-act-referendum-fact-sheet>; <https://www.hospice.org.nz/resources/end-of-life-choice-act-our-concerns/euthanasia-our-opinion/>

⁴ See, for example, Herx L, Cottle M, and Scott J. The “Normalization” of Euthanasia in Canada: the Cautionary Tale Continues. *World Medical Journal*, https://www.wma.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/newwmj_2_2020_WEB.pdf