

## Religious leaders warn of dangers in poorly drafted End of Life Choice Act

Some of New Zealand's most prominent religious leaders say New Zealanders need to be aware of the considerable harm that the End of Life Choice Act could do and are urging them to vote No in the referendum at this year's general election.

"We acknowledge the importance of freedom of choice, however there are significant weaknesses and dangers in this Act which will fail to protect the most vulnerable," says Archbishop Philip Richardson of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand.

"In our caring roles we support the dying and their families, and we understand just how vulnerable people are at the end-of-life, including, often, the feeling of being a burden. That experience has given us real insights into how the End of Life Choice Act will work in the real world. Our concerns are about the unintended consequences for the most vulnerable people."

The leaders' letter focuses on the risks and dangers associated with the Act itself. Included in the letter is a strong critique of the Act because it fails to include key safeguards present in overseas laws, including no mandatory stand-down period - under the Act, a person could be dead less than four days after diagnosis; weak processes for detecting if people feel pressured; and that the Act does not require a patient to discuss their decision with a family member or other significant person.

"Our communities include doctors and nurses who work at the front line of end-of-life care and we have listened to their concerns. We have also listened to the concerns of lawyers who understand how laws work and who think that this law is badly drafted and lacking critical safeguards present in other overseas laws.

"Our opposition to this Act reflects our compassion for those who will experience a wrongful premature death because of the dangers of this Act; in particular those who will feel coerced into an early death, whether because of their own feelings of being a burden or because of overt pressure from others.

"As we note in our letter: Even those who favour some form of assisted death have many reasons to Vote NO to this Act. We are simply adding our concerns about how the Act will operate in practice to the expressed concerns of many other New Zealanders."

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*The letter and full list of signatories is attached.*