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Illinois Takes Dangerous Path with Legalization of Assisted Suicide

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When Governor Pritzker signed the physician assisted suicide bill into law, he put Illinois on a dangerous and heartbreaking path—one that legitimizes suicide as a valid solution for life’s challenges. Rather than investing in real end-of-life support such as palliative and hospice care, pain management, and family-centered accompaniment, our state has chosen to normalize killing oneself. This law ignores the very real failures in access to quality care that drive vulnerable people to despair. It does nothing to ensure patients are offered services, protected from coercion, or surrounded by loved ones when they kill themselves.

Even more alarming, by enacting this law, Illinois is endorsing the death option while claiming compassion. This message will be heard by vulnerable groups not as a balm for the dying but as a societally acceptable alternative to living. Indeed, studies show that where assisted suicide has been made legal, the number of all suicides has risen. How can we urge teens and young adults—knowing suicide is the second-leading cause of death in their age group—not to choose death, while our own laws say that suicide can be a “medical option”? We may fund suicide prevention hotlines, expand suicide prevention programs, and train communities, but those efforts are hollow when we are simultaneously signaling that some lives are too burdensome or too expensive to save. Can we depend on distressed youth and others to understand the difference between their pain and that of the dying?

Governor Pritzker and legislators who supported this legislation had a choice to build a future in which every person, especially the sick and vulnerable, is cared for with dignity, love, and support—or to open the door to a system where death becomes a permissible alternative. With SB 1950 now law, we must speak even more strongly that true compassion means helping people live, not helping them die.