

Archbishop-elect Sherrington statement as assisted suicide bill reaches Report Stage

- May 20th, 2025

Archbishop-elect John Sherrington, Lead Bishop for Life Issues for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, has issued the following statement after the Private Member's Bill seeking to legalise assisted suicide entered its Report Stage on Friday, 16 May 2025.

The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have consistently maintained that the bill is wrong in principle as well as being fundamentally flawed. Moreover, the parliamentary process used for this bill has been shown to be woefully inadequate and has lacked time for proper and sustained debate. Information about the bill and its amendments has been repeatedly published very close to key debates, leaving MPs with insufficient time for consideration. During the Report Stage, MPs had only five hours to discuss nearly 60 pages of amendments.

We are deeply concerned that parliament has rejected an amendment which would have allowed hospices and care homes not to participate in any way in assisted suicide. If this bill should pass, we have serious concerns about the ability of Catholic hospices and care homes to function effectively and continue delivering high-quality palliative care. We are also concerned that people will find it difficult to find institutions where they can feel safe.[1] Hospices and care homes will not be able to prevent an employee from facilitating assisted suicide.[2] Further, there is no guarantee that NHS or local authority funding will not in the future be tied to the provision of assisted suicide by care homes and hospices.

I am grateful to Sarah Olney MP for pointing out that assisted suicide undermines the mission and purpose of hospices and care homes and that "they should have the right to refuse to provide it on their premises if they do not wish to participate in it". Edward Leigh MP raises the concern that: "If, according to the Minister, care homes run by religious orders will have to provide this service, those orders will have to get out of care homes altogether." This is an alarming prospect which reduces freedom in our society.

I have grave reservations about the proposed amendment to give a wider range of professionals increased opt outs from being involved with assisted suicide. Experience shows that even where medical professionals are granted conscientious objection to assisted suicide, their ability to opt out is later restricted as access to provision takes precedence.

As the bill approaches its third reading, I urge Catholics and all people of goodwill to take action by praying and contacting your MP to raise awareness about the irreversible harm this bill would cause. MPs must have proper time to debate a law which fundamentally changes society. This has not happened and so the Bill must be rejected.

Our Lady, Help of Christians, pray for us.

Archbishop-elect John Sherrington
Lead Bishop for Life Issues
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

References

[1] <https://bioethics.org.uk/news-events/news-from-the-centre/press-statement-hospices-to-be-forced-to-provide-assisted-suicide/>

[2] <https://bioethics.org.uk/news-events/news-from-the-centre/press-statement-hospices-to-be-forced-to-provide-assisted-suicide/>

Note: Archbishop-elect John Sherrington will be Installed the tenth Archbishop of Liverpool on Tuesday, 27 May 2025.