

EDITORIAL OP-ED

A Life-or-Death Issue for New Jersey

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Lobbyists for physician-assisted suicide are mounting a campaign to push its passage through the New Jersey legislature in the coming weeks.

The movement to legalize physician-assisted suicide does not die easily. For six years, New Jersey's Orthodox community has fought off attempts to make into law an idea that would corrupt the humane foundations of the physician's sacred task of healing and that undermines the presumption that all must be done to preserve life and reduce suffering.

While this odious legislative proposal has met with defeat after defeat, there is no guarantee that the lobbyists for life will succeed again in stopping it from becoming law. In addition to the fact that it has garnered increasing numbers of votes over the past six years, something else has changed — the occupant of the governor's mansion.

As Rabbi Avi Schnall, Agudath Israel's New Jersey director, told *Hamodia*, Governor Phil Murphy's support for the issue could make this recurring nightmare into a harsh reality.

Besides lack of support in the state senate, former Governor Chris Christie's pledge to veto the bill if it ever reached his desk certainly weakened the forces fighting for its passage. When he was governor, they knew that their efforts would ultimately be futile.

That situation has now changed. With the governor's backing, the "Aid in Dying for the Terminally Ill Act," as it is called, is more dangerous than ever.

Should this bill become law, it would allow doctors to prescribe lethal medications to a patient who is in the terminal stage of an illness, disease or condition with a prognosis, based upon reasonable medical certainty, of a life expectancy of six months or less.

As such, even those who would never consider the suicide option would find their lives in jeopardy, as doctors may be discouraged from pursuing life-prolonging treatments for patients who have been deemed terminally ill. An additional concern is that such a law would lead insurance companies to refuse to cover care for such individuals.

Most states in the United States, as well as most countries in the world, still reject the concept of physician-assisted suicide. Only the states of Oregon, New Mexico, Vermont, and Washington have passed such legislation; abroad, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Colombia, Luxembourg, Germany, Japan and Canada have legalized it in one form or another.

New York and New Jersey have been among those staunchly resisting the immoral trend. But it gets harder and harder to maintain that resistance, not only due to changes in the political landscape locally, but also in light of national trends.

In the fast-approaching midterm elections, "progressive" candidates in the Democratic party are expected by some pundits to be the key to the Democrats winning back a majority in the House of Representatives, and "progressives" are also poised to make significant gains in state and city races around the country.

As Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Agudah's executive vice president, observed, "Assisted suicide is definitely something on the progressives' agenda ..." and if their electoral ambitions are realized in November, it will give even greater impetus to the stubborn effort to make the death option more available.

The rest of the country will take note if New Jersey's legislators succumb to progressive pressure in the current political climate. At stake is not only the sanctity of life in New Jersey, but in the rest of the country as well.

There is no question as to the urgency of the matter. A letter signed by more than 30 prominent Rabbanim and *Roshei Yeshivah* — including Harav Shmuel Kamenetsky, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Yeshivah of Philadelphia*, and Harav Dovid Schustal, *shlita*, *Rosh Yeshivah*, Beth Medrash Govoha — declared this issue a "top priority" for the Jewish community.

The letter urged people not only to vote for candidates who would oppose such legislation, but to directly contact their local legislators in the state house. Phone calls and emails from concerned constituents (to whom politicians owe their jobs) can indeed make a difference.

While voting for someone who stands for — or at least sympathizes with — the principle of the sanctity of life is important, the vote is for a person, not any specific issue. But there is no such ambiguity in a direct communication with an elected official when the call is made specifically on a given issue.

Make it clear to them that they must choose life.

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