THE ISSUE: SB 128 End of Life (Wolk, D-Davis)
Proposes to legalize “physician-assisted suicide” (Opposed)

HISTORY & BACKGROUND
For many years, this type of legislation has been vigorously and successfully opposed by numerous organizations representing doctors, individuals with disabilities, faith-based organizations, mental health advocates, hospitals, hospice workers, minorities, the poor and uninsured. This wide cross-section of California’s population believes that physician-assisted suicide represents misguided public policy which would have numerous detrimental impacts on our most vulnerable citizens, devalue quality patient care, particularly at the end of life, erode the doctor-patient relationship and create a less caring society.

SB 128 is one of many bills in 13 states promoted by Compassion and Choices (the former Hemlock Society). A number of bills have already failed. SB 128 is an “Oregon style” proposal and offers illusory “safeguards” which are neither responsible nor enforceable. In jurisdictions where assisted suicide has been decriminalized, these “safeguards” have been expanded or ignored to the point of that assisted suicide has been offered to non-terminal patients and children.

CHURCH TEACHING
We know that each of our lives is a gift from a loving God and whether rich or poor, young or old, healthy or ill, abled or disabled, we are responsible stewards of that gift. We are bound together and do not abandon those who are in need. We “embrace our dying”- our own and others. Physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia are never alternatives to fear and anxiety.

TALKING POINTS
- A request for suicide is a cry for care.
- Those who are in publicly funded health insurance programs and possibly private insurance programs will be vulnerable to being subtly influenced to choose the “cheaper option.”
- California law already gives every patient the right to refuse extraordinary end-of-life treatment. Current practice promotes palliative and hospice care and advanced pain management treatment. This proposal will further these efforts.
- Public policymakers should ensure that California leads the nation in providing its residents with access to comprehensive end-of-life and palliative care, not physician-assisted suicide.
- The experience in Belgium and the Netherlands confirms that the long term reality is that some lives are now considered “not worth living” and euthanasia is actually practiced.

—Pope Francis Message to Catholics for their annual Day of Life (7/17/2013)