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******Coalition press office this Friday and Saturday, Sept. 1-2: Home & Health Care Association of Massachusetts office at 20 Park Plaza, Suite 620, 617-482-8830******

Broad Coalition Urges Focus on Positive Alternatives to Assisted Suicide

August 30, 2000 (Boston, MA) - A coalition of prominent medical, hospice, disability rights, and other groups is urging the media to balance its coverage of this weekend's world-wide conference in Boston of the Hemlock Society with reporting on the many positive alternatives to assisted suicide. In a statement to be released this weekend, the groups challenge the legalization of assisted suicide as a misguided approach to end of life concerns. Instead, healthcare and faith communities should search for improved means to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs of patients and their families.

Representatives of the coalition will be available to the press throughout the long Labor Day weekend to outline ways that the loving presence of families, hospice services, pain management, and compassionate community support can provide comfort and hope to those living with disabling and life-threatening conditions.

The coalition of groups insists that the legalization of assisted suicide poses unnecessary and unmanageable conflicts for patients, distorts the goals of the healthcare professions, and stigmatizes those deemed eligible for suicide.

The groups, not always allies on other issues, are united in the mission of ensuring a full and equal accounting of the positive alternatives to assisted suicide. They agree about the benefits of hospice, the compassion of effective pain relief, the dignity of all persons, and the incredible commitment of so many people who care for the dying and disabled. They are committed to ensuring that positive solutions and life-affirming alternatives are available to comfort those with severe conditions.

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A Statement Regarding the World Conference in Boston on Assisted Dying

At their Boston conference over Labor Day weekend, the Hemlock Society and the World Federation of Right to Die Societies will promote the legalization of assisted suicide as a response to the tragic stories of persons with serious disabilities or those at the end of life who say they want help to die. The organizations' focus on death as a remedy, including for those who are disabled and not terminally ill, greatly concerns the many groups and individuals listed below that care about, and care for, persons living with disabilities and terminal conditions.

Thus, we come together out of a mutual conviction that an important message must reach the media and members of the public to balance the coverage that the right to die conference inevitably will garner. We believe that positive solutions can and must be provided to assist patients and their families, and that the legalization of assisted suicide must be opposed.

Life-affirming alternatives are available in our society to comfort those diagnosed with severe conditions. The challenge before us is to educate one another about these alternatives, to improve our ability to deliver good care to those who need it, and to strengthen our financial commitment to serving the vulnerable. We must continue to build linkages between our healthcare, social, and faith-based institutions, and thereby treat with full and abiding respect those disabled more by our societal indifference than by the severity of their prognosis.

No one can deny the existence of pain and the experience of abandonment that often accompany disabling conditions and the dying process. These realities have spurred the healthcare and faith communities to search for improved means to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs of those affected. The loving presence of families, hospice services, pain management, and compassionate community support can provide comfort and hope to those living with disabling and life-threatening conditions.

Out of these efforts has grown a deep and broadly held conviction that the way of the Hemlock Society and the World Federation of Right to Die Societies is not the approach society should endorse. The legalization of assisted suicide would pose unnecessary and unmanageable conflicts for patients with disabilities and terminal conditions, distort the goals of the healthcare professions, and stigmatize those deemed eligible for suicide aid as less worthy of protection.

We urge the media to give a full and equal accounting of this remarkable consensus in society when it reports on the right to die conference and the issue of assisted suicide. Patients and their families who face difficult circumstances at the end of life or who struggle with otherwise serious illness or disability deserve media treatment of the debate that refuses to exploit the very real pain their circumstances entail. While we know that so much more must be done for those in need, we stand ready to offer our positive part of the story. Thus, we come together not only out of concern, but also to celebrate the benefits of hospice, the compassion of effective pain relief, the dignity of all persons, and the incredible commitment of so many people who care for the dying and disabled, not as candidates for assisted suicide, but as individuals who deserve our assistance in living.

August 2000

The following organizations and individuals agree with the *August 2000 Statement Regarding the World Conference in Boston on Assisted Dying*. They are listed in no particular order, and any institutional references for individuals are for identification purposes only.

Organizations

Home & Health Care Association of Massachusetts

Islamic Center of New England

Massachusetts Family Institute

Hospice & Palliative Care Federation of Massachusetts

Massachusetts Nurses Association

Caritas Christi Health Systems

Massachusetts Physicians Resource Council

Greek Orthodox Diocese of Boston

Pro-Life Legal Defense Fund

Massachusetts Medical Society

New England Conference of the Catholic Health Association

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, New England Synod

Salvation Army, Massachusetts Division Headquarters

Covenant Health Systems

Massachusetts Citizens For Life

Women Affirming Life

Massachusetts Catholic Conference

Not Dead Yet

National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention—New England

Minnesota Physicians for Life

Human Life Alliance

Amputee Association of Maryland, Inc.

Physicians for Compassionate Care

Euthanasia Prevention Coalition of Ontario Canada

National Catholic Bioethics Center

American Life League

National Legal Center for the Medically Dependent & Disabled, Inc.

Disability Focus, Inc.

Individuals

Hon. Paul White, J.D., former Massachusetts state senator, Boston, MA

James L.J. Nuzzo, J.D., M.D., Colchester Group, public policy consultant, Newton, MA

Reverend Ray Hammond, Bethel AME Church, Jamaica Plain, MA

Professor Arthur J. Dyck, Mary B. Saltonstall Prof. Of Population Ethics, Harvard Divinity School, MA

Richard Fenigsen, M.D., author of studies on Dutch euthanasia, Cambridge, MA

Prof. Dwight Duncan, Associate Professor of Constitutional Law and Bioethics, Southern New England School of Law, MA

John Jefferson Davis, Ph.D., Professor of Systematic Theology & Christian Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, MA

Nat Hentoff, Village Voice columnist, civil rights advocate

John T. Maltzberger, M.D., Assoc. Clinical Prof. Of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Ira Byock, M.D., physician, author, advocate for improved end-of-life care

Wesley Smith, J.D., consumer advocate, author of *Forced Exit*, book about euthanasia movement

Ralph P. Miech, M.D., Ph.D., Brown University School of Medicine

Eric Chevlen, M.D., Director of Palliative Care, St. Elizabeth Hospital, Youngstown, Ohio

Robert D. Orr, M.D., Director of Ethics, Fletcher Allen Health Care and the University of Vermont College of Medicine

William L. Toffler M.D., Professor of Family Medicine, Oregon Health Sciences University

Edmund Pellegrino, M.D., Professor of Medicine & Medical Ethics, Georgetown University

Justin Dart, Jr., Internationally known advocate for disabilities rights and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

Walter R. Hunter, M.D., Associate National Medical Director, VistaCare Hospice

Scott FitzGibbon, Professor of Law, Boston College Law School, MA

James E. Thornton, Board Member, Democrats for Life of America, former Staff Assistant to Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey

Mary Ann Glendon, Professor of Law, Harvard University