

Statement from the Archbishop of Southwark Following the Vote on Assisted Dying in the House of Commons

I am deeply saddened and extremely worried by the progress made in the House of Commons towards the legalisation of assisted suicide. While this is not yet the final step in enacting this legislation, it represents a seismic and concerning shift in our nation's approach to caring for the most vulnerable among us.

Compassion, rightly understood, means standing with those who suffer, sharing their burdens, and honouring their dignity until the natural end of their lives. It does not mean hastening death, even in the face of pain or despair. Every human life is of immeasurable value, and our response must always be to protect and support those who are most in need.

The experience of other countries where assisted suicide has been introduced serves as a grave warning. Promised safeguards are eroded over time, leaving the elderly, disabled, and seriously ill at risk of feeling their lives are a burden to others. The subtle, and sometimes overt, pressure this creates threatens the very fabric of a society built on care and protection for the weakest.

Legalising assisted suicide also undermines the essential trust between patients and healthcare professionals. Those who dedicate their lives to healing and comforting the sick are being placed in an untenable position. Conscientious objection – the right of medical practitioners, nursing and care staff, and institutions to refuse to participate in practices that violate their deeply held ethical or religious convictions – must be upheld and protected. Without this assurance, the ethos of our healthcare system and the integrity of those who serve within it are at serious risk.

Instead of moving towards assisted suicide, we must commit to improving palliative care, ensuring that expert pain relief, emotional support, and spiritual care are available to all who need them. No one should feel alone or abandoned in their suffering.

As we face this challenging moment, I call on Catholics and all people of goodwill to advocate for the protection of life at every stage and to stand in solidarity with those who are most vulnerable. Let us also turn to the Lord Jesus, who shared in human suffering and revealed the depth of his love through his death and resurrection. Through him, we find the strength to defend the dignity of every person and to build a society that values the gift of life from conception to natural death.

Archbishop John Wilson
29 November 2024