Assisted Suicide Referendum Effort Submits Signatures to Elections Officials

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Sacramento, CA – The Coalition Against Assisted Suicide announced today they are submitting signatures with elections officials to complete the referendum drive in opposition to legislation that allows physicians to help kill vulnerable Californians. “We are very grateful to the thousands of volunteers who collected signatures in opposition to this dangerous law that will put our most vulnerable Californians at risk,” said Dr. Mark Hoffman, the proponent of the referendum. “Submissions are being made in each county today, but it does not appear that we will have sufficient signatures. We had a very narrow window of time to gather the required number of petitions, however, even if we have failed to qualify the referendum for the next general election ballot, our work to oppose this law will not be over. We will explore other options, including legal action to protect vulnerable seniors, the infirm and the disabled from being pressured to end their lives prematurely because others consider them to be a burden or might benefit financially from their death. We believe that every life is valuable and is entitled to protection.” The so-called “physician assisted suicide” law had failed to pass through the regular process, when it became clear the bill was dangerous to not only the elderly, the infirm, and the disabled, but also to low income Californians. Re-introduced as ABX2-15, the bill was passed by the Legislature in a special session for which the measure was not eligible to be considered. Shortly thereafter, Governor Brown signed it despite this illegality and then misstated the law in his signing statement. It will not take effect until 90 days after the special session concludes, sometime in 2016. “The referendum process proved to us that voters are concerned about this law once they learn about the many flaws it contains,” Dr. Hoffman said. “For example, even though virtually every terminally ill patient suffers from depression, the law does not require any psychological examination of a patient before a physician helps the individual be killed by suicide. The law doesn’t even require a witness to be present to ensure that a vulnerable person is not killed by a third-party who might benefit from the death, such as an heir or insurance beneficiary. The law also asserts that these killings would not be considered suicides. Accordingly, death certificates are not expected to list the real cause of death, which has great potential to exacerbate California’s serious elder abuse problem. Our petition drive showed that when voters come to understand the law’s flaws and implications, they reject it.” The referendum process is a difficult and rarely attempted one as proponents have only 90 days to secure the approximately 366,000 signatures needed to qualify the measure to the ballot. The assisted suicide referendum had the added challenge of having to be conducted during the three biggest holiday periods of the year – Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s. Referendum proponents thus had little time to mount their volunteer drive. “Even if we didn’t have enough time to qualify the referendum to the ballot, the effort has proven to us that our fellow Californians are strongly against this law once they understand how dangerous it is to our most vulnerable citizens,” Dr. Hoffman said. “The public policy of California should not allow vulnerable, depressed, terminally-ill citizens to be killed. Our laws should instead ensure that seniors, the terminally ill and the disabled receive the medical and psychological support they need when they are in a vulnerable state. We look forward to presenting our case in other forums as necessity and opportunity afford.”

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