



# NEWS

## Department of Communications

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **BISHOPS' HEAD HAILS GOVERNMENT'S DECISION ON ASSISTED SUICIDE USING FEDERALLY CONTROLLED DRUGS**

**WASHINGTON--**Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) hailed today's directive by the U.S. Attorney General overturning a 1998 opinion which allowed federally controlled drugs to be used in physician-assisted suicide.

"This important directive not only ends the federal government's involvement in assisted suicide, but also promotes improved pain management for patients near the end of life," Bishop Fiorenza said.

This is the text of the statement by Bishop Fiorenza:

"We applaud the Bush Administration's decision today to end the federal government's involvement in physician-assisted suicide.

U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft's directive overturns a June 1998 opinion by then-Attorney General Janet Reno, which allowed federally controlled drugs to be used for physician-assisted suicide in any state which permits the practice. Currently Oregon has the only state law allowing physician-assisted suicide. By stating that assisting suicide could be a 'legitimate medical purpose' for use of federally controlled drugs, the Reno opinion required the Drug Enforcement Administration to issue federal prescribing licenses to physicians who would misuse them to help take patients' lives. With today's decision, federal law will again be correctly interpreted to forbid misuse of controlled substances to assist suicides.

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In other federal programs, and in states passing new laws against assisted suicide, use of controlled substances for pain control has dramatically *improved* once the law recognizes a clear difference between intentional taking of life and the unintended side effects of necessary pain control. Attorney General Ashcroft's decision fully respects this medical, legal and ethical distinction.

Suicide among the sick and elderly is not a 'medical' practice. It is a tragic public health problem that deserves our concern and caring response. Good medicine and good law call on physicians to kill pain, not patients. President Bush and Attorney General Ashcroft should be thanked for affirming this vitally important principle."

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