Why Here?

How The Legalization of Physician-Assisted Dying Began as a Pacific Northwest Phenomenon in the United States
Timeline

- 1950s – started to be discussed
- 1991 – WA rejects referendum
- 1992 – CA rejects referendum
- 1994 – OR passes referendum
- 1997 – *Washington v. Glucksberg*
- 1998 – MI rejects referendum
- 2000 – ME rejects referendum
- 2006 – *Gonzales v. Oregon*
- 2008 – WA passes referendum
- 2009 – MT Supreme Court ruling
- 2012 – MA rejects referendum
- 2013 – VT governor signs law
- Today – Bills under consideration in CT, HA, KS, MA, NH, NJ, and PA
Public Opinion Data

• About six-in-ten adults (62%) say that a person suffering a great deal of pain with no hope of improvement has a moral right to commit suicide, up from 55% in 1990 (Views)

• On the issue of physician-assisted suicide: 47% approve and 49% disapprove. Attitudes on physician-assisted suicide were roughly the same in 2005 (Views)

• Similar percentages found by Gallup polls
Referendum System

• As noted in Orfali interview

• Initiative:
  • A measure that is put on the ballot because of a petition signed by a certain minimum number of registered voters
  • Direct and indirect

• Referendum:
  • General term for a measure that appears on a ballot

• States that have initiatives: CA (d), MA (i), ME (i), MI (i), OR (d), WA (d&i)
  • CA exception
  • When referendums failed in ME and MA, it was by a close margin
Non-Religious

- “Importance of religion in one’s life... very important”
  - WA: 48%
  - OR: 46%
  - US national: 56%

- Weakening religious affiliation in general, rise of the nones

- Religious groups are largely opposed to physician-assisted dying
  - Refusal of treatment or ending treatment is morally acceptable
  - There are exceptions

- Evidence that religion affects political decisions

- Catholic resistance fails in Oregon, succeeds in Massachusetts
Demographics

• Age
  • Increasingly elderly national population
    • 62 years and older
      • 14.7% in 2000, 16.2% in 2010
  • The West region has the youngest median age (35.6), while the Northeast has the highest (39.2)
    • Median age has been increasing
    • May explain VT
    • West has 11.9% of the population over 65 years
      • WA – 12.3% and 37.3 years, OR – 13.9% and 38.4 years, USA – 13.0% and 37.2 years
Figure 5.
Median Age by State: 2010
(For information on confidentiality protection, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/doc/sf1.pdf)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Summary File 1.
Demographics cont.

• Suicide
  • Nationally: “Among the highest rates (when categorized by gender and race) are suicide deaths for white men over 85. (54 per 100,000)”

Suicide Rates per 100,000 for people age 65 and older (2010)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>12.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>17.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographics cont.

- High socioeconomic status
- Education
- Race/ethnicity
Questions?