



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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Bioethics Public Policy Report February 15, 2019

National

- *Senate can't ban infanticide:* On February 4th, US Senator Ben Sasse (R-Neb) [introduced](#) the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, a law that compels doctors to provide medical care to a child born alive after an abortion procedure. The bill also requires that a child born in an abortion clinic be transferred to a hospital. Sasse wanted to pass the bill via unanimous consent through a roll-call vote stating, "I'm going to ask all 100 senators to come to the floor and be against infanticide. This shouldn't be complicated." Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash) objected to the bill, thus ending the vote. Republicans have introduced the Act every day since asking for a vote, but Democrats continue to object.
- *LARC increase after Trump election:* A research letter [published](#) in JAMA Internal Medicine demonstrates that in the months following the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, the number of women going on long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCS) has increased significantly. In the month prior to the 2016 election there were 13.7 LARC insertions per 100,000 women per day. This rate increased to 16.3 insertions per 100,000 women per day in the month following the election. LARCS include intra-uterine devices (IUDs) and implants. Researchers believe increased LARC use is the result of fears that the Trump Administration will place restrictions on—or otherwise alter access to—birth control through changes to the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).
- *Why people are using medical marijuana:* According to a still unpublished [report](#), approximately sixty-two percent of people who hold a medical marijuana license are using it to treat chronic pain. Other reasons for use include spasms associated with multiple sclerosis, nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy, post-traumatic stress disorder, and cancer.
- *Teen tobacco use increasing, vaping believed to be to blame:* According to the Centers for Disease Control's new [report](#) "Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students – United States, 2011–2018," the number of teens using tobacco is increasing rapidly. 4.9 million young people reported being tobacco users which translates into 1 in four high school students and 1 in 14 middle school students. This increase is being fueled in large measure by e-cigarettes (vaping). From 2017 to 2018, e-cigarette usage increased from 11.7 percent to 20.8 percent among high school students and from 3.3 percent to 4.9 percent among middle school students. Overall, there 1.5 million more youth e-cigarette users in 2018 than in 2017. The CDC also reported there was no change in the use of other tobacco products, including traditional cigarettes, during this time period.

- *More Americans underinsured?* The Commonwealth Fund has issued the latest edition of its Biennial Health Insurance [Survey](#); here are the highlights:
 - The uninsured rate for adults in 2018 was 12.4 percent, “statistically unchanged” from 2016.
 - Fewer adults are uninsured today compared to 2010 and the duration of coverage gaps has shortened significantly.
 - More people are underinsured now than in 2010, the greatest increase occurring among those in employer health care plans.

Federal Courts

- *Supreme Court blocks implementation of Louisiana abortion restrictions, for now:* In a 5–4 decision, the US Supreme Court has temporarily [blocked](#) the enforcement of Louisiana’s Act 620, the Unsafe Abortion Protection Act, that requires doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 minutes of the abortion facility. Chief Justice John Roberts sided with the four liberal members of the Court in blocking enforcement, stating he needs more information about the law’s effects. Abortion supporters argue that if the Unsafe Abortion Protection Act takes effect, it will leave the state with only one abortion provider. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in January that the law did not substantially burden a woman seeking abortion. The high court will likely take up Act 620 in its next term.

State by State

- *Pro-life day in Alaska:* On the 46th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, [Alaska](#) Governor Mike Dunleavy declared a state-wide “Right to Life” day. Dunleavy, a pro-life Catholic, took office in December 2018. His proclamation for the “Right to Life” day stated, in part, “[A]s a state, we must resolve to protect innocent human life at every stage. As Governor, I am committed to the promise made in our Declaration of Independence to protect Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. I recognize that without Life, there is no Liberty. Without Liberty, there is no freedom for the individual Pursuit of Happiness. My policy will always be to defend human life at all stages.”
- *Illinois bishops say “no” to pot:* The six Catholic bishops of [Illinois](#) have released a statement opposing the legalization of recreational marijuana. Medical marijuana has been legal in Illinois since 2013, but a bill to legalize it for recreational use is expected to be introduced soon. In speaking against the proposed bill, the bishops cite research indicating that marijuana can be addictive and that people addicted to “harder” drugs often start with marijuana and alcohol. The bishops further stated, “As lawmakers consider this issue, it is important to remember they are not only debating legalization of marijuana, but also commercialization of a drug into an industry the state will profit from. In seeking the common good, the state should protect its citizens.” Ten states plus the District of Columbia have legalized the recreational use of marijuana, however it remains illegal under federal law.
- *Assisted suicide moves forward in NJ:* On February 7th, a [New Jersey](#) state senate committee voted 6–3 to advance the state’s latest assisted suicide bill to the full state Senate. Two committee members—Senate President Sen. Stephen Sweeney (D) and Sen. Nicholas Scutari (D), both co-sponsors of the bill—had replaced senators who opposed the bill. Among other provisions, the New Jersey

bill requires two physicians to certify that the patient has less than six months to live and it also requires that the patient make three requests (one in writing) for the lethal medication.

- *Assisted suicide bill introduced in Maryland:* As promised by supporters, House Bill 399/Senate Bill 311, the so-called “End of Life Options Act,” has been introduced in the [Maryland](#) General Assembly. If signed into law, the bill will allow doctors to prescribe lethal medications to patients diagnosed with a terminal illness who have six months or less to live. The bill will also protect doctors who prescribe the lethal drugs from prosecution. HB 399/SB 311, which is supported by Compassion and Choices, is the fourth attempt in five years to legalize assisted suicide in Maryland. Similar bills were introduced 2015, 2016, and 2017 but were withdrawn before coming to a full vote. Opponents argue the present bill is dangerously flawed because it contains no assessment screens for depression nor is there any means to assure that patients are not being pressured into ending their lives.

International

- *Child in UK has surgery outside womb, then put back in:* When United Kingdom resident Bethan Simpson’s unborn daughter was diagnosed with spina bifida, she and husband Kieron made a remarkable and thought-provoking decision. Instead of pursuing abortion, the couple instead chose a [procedure](#) where the child was removed from Bethan’s womb, received corrective surgery, and was the put back in to develop to full term. The procedure was performed in January and scans show the child is healing and there is no evidence of the spina bifida. This case from overseas is raising important questions concerning abortion, particularly in terms of the various late-term abortion laws currently making news in the US. Princeton University professor Robert George clarified the illogic of these late-term abortion laws when he posted the following:

“Let me see if I have this straight. When the baby was in (the womb) rather than out, it was OK to kill her. (Choice!) Then when she was out rather than in, it was not OK to kill her. But then when she was put back in and was no longer out, it went back to being OK to kill her. Do I have that right?”
- *Socialist state’s health system collapsing:* Data from [Venezuela](#) demonstrate just how far the socialist nation’s health system is collapsing. Today, the infant mortality rate is 21.1 deaths per 1,000 births compared with 15 deaths per 1,000 in 2008. Malnutrition and HIV rates are rising as are rates of preventable illnesses including diphtheria and diarrhea. Doctors treating people fleeing the nation report that lack of food and access to basic health care are the primary reasons why people are leaving.
- *Pro-family platform in Hungary:* In his recent state-of-the-nation address, [Hungary’s](#) Prime Minister Viktor Orban proposed a new family protection action plan for his country; highlights include:
 - Every woman under 40 is eligible to a preferential loan when she gets married.
 - The preferential loan of the family home purchase program will be extended; families raising two or more children will now also be able to use the program to purchase a resale home.

- The government will repay a percentage of the mortgage loan of families with two or more children (currently the program includes families with three or more children).
- Women who raise at least four children will be exempt from personal income taxes for the rest of their lives.
- Grandparents will be eligible to receive the country's child-care fee.

Sharing the News: If you have public policy news that you would like to share with the NCBC, or if you have colleagues who would like to receive the Bioethics Public Policy Report, please contact Joe Zalot at 215-871-2014 or jzalot@ncbcenter.org.

Sharing the Resources: The web page of The National Catholic Bioethics Center, available at <http://www.ncbcenter.org/>, is a significant resource for bioethics information. NCBC bioethicists are also on-call for consultation twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week, at 215-877-2660.

Previous editions of the Bioethics Public Policy Report are available on the NCBC website at <https://www.ncbcenter.org/advocacy/public-policy-reports/>.