

18 December 2024

**TO ALL MINISTERS AND CONGREGATIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND
UPDATE FROM THE COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Dear Colleagues

You will be aware that since we last wrote to you, Westminster Parliament took the momentous decision on 29 November 2024 to progress a bill legalising assisted suicide for the first time. This will have massive societal consequences right across these islands. While there are many legal hurdles still to come and the law will not come into force for many years yet, we should not underestimate the Rubicon that has just been crossed.

We are writing to remind you about the Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia Hub which can be accessed at <https://www.presbyterianireland.org/livinganddyingwell> urging you to continue to pray for this issue.

We would also encourage ministers in NI to encourage any members of your congregations with either a lived experience of; or those who work as health care providers, to respond to the Committee for Health, [Palliative Care Inquiry](#), which closes on the 10 January 2025.

Additionally, the Council for Public Affairs acknowledges the dedication and commitment of all those who work in the palliative care sector, especially volunteers, many of whom sit in our congregations, who work tirelessly to raise funds and support this important service. We would like to encourage churches and congregations to affirm all those who work in any of the palliative care services, including those who provide administrative support, volunteer and fundraise for this valuable service.

Attached you will find a sheet with additional information which could be distributed to congregations. This includes an update on the Bill, PCI's position and some practical steps that you can take. Additionally, Appendix 1, provides a copy of the resolutions that were passed at November's Council Meeting, for your information.

Thank you for your continued help in this important matter.

Yours in Christ's Service



Rev Daniel Kane
(Convenor of the Council of Public Affairs)



Dr Rebecca Stevenson
(Public Affairs Officer)

ASSISTED SUICIDE/EUTHANASIA: UPDATE

As you will be aware on 29 November 2024, Kim Leadbeater's Assisted Suicide Bill passed into the next stage of the legislative process.

Although the UK Bill applies directly to England and Wales, as a denomination we are on public record expressing our 'deep disappointment, sadness and regret' at the outcome of the vote in the House of Commons, describing it as 'a watershed moment for the United Kingdom'. We also state our belief 'that the resources required to establish state assisted suicide should not detrimentally affect the UK's commitment to palliative care and the NHS in general.' We call on both the Irish and UK governments to prioritise investment in and provision of the best possible palliative care in the UK and Ireland with the utmost urgency.

As a denomination we will continue to oppose the UK Bill as it comes to the Third Reading as we believe everything is still to play for and pray for. We also affirm our fervent belief that the Gospel continues to be the best story with its positive life-giving message of Christ who is our hope in life and death.

Where personal autonomy and individual choice have often driven this debate, we should remember that in our humanity we are also spiritual beings, created for dependence, not self-sufficiency. Our comfort and confidence in our suffering is that there is the assurance of everlasting life, by God's Grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Practical steps for you to take:

- 1 Continue to make this a matter for prayer asking for a compassionate and wise response from the crucial committee that will scrutinize the Westminster Assisted Dying Bill. Ministers might also give some thought to making this a specific point for prayer at services of public worship.
- 2 In NI, encourage any members of your congregations with either a lived experience of; or those who work as health care providers, to respond to the Committee for Health, Palliative Care Inquiry which closes on 10 January 2025.
- 3 Encourage and affirm all those who work in any of the palliative care services, including those who provide administrative support, volunteer and fundraise for this valuable service. Ministers might also consider making public acknowledgement of this at a service of worship.
- 4 We urge you to consider practical ways by which you could support hospice services across Ireland; for example, through fundraising for a local support charity or volunteering at a local palliative care facility.
- 5 Direct members and others to the "Living and Dying Well" HUB on the PCI website.

Appendix 1

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS' RESOLUTIONS November 2024

Related to Northern Ireland Assembly

- 1 The Council for Public Affairs (CPA) welcomes the announcement from the Minister for Communities to provide a fuel support payment to all pensioners in Northern Ireland which will benefit about 57,000 pensioners. Additionally, we would urge that this payment is made as quickly as possible to ensure that those in need can benefit as soon as possible.

- 2 The CPA is deeply concerned about the impact the end of the Benefit Cap Mitigation will have on the deepening poverty crisis in NI when it expires at the end of March 2025. The CPA welcomes the comments made by the Minister for Communities during Assembly question time on 26 November 2024, where he reaffirmed his intention to bring an Anti-Poverty Strategy to the Executive before January and urges him to bring forward an extension to this measure both in the short and longer term.

Resolutions following the Budget

- 3 The CPA calls on locally elected MPs to take urgent action to mitigate the effects of several of the proposals in the October 2024 budget here in NI, including the following:
 - (a) To extend the exemption from the proposed increases to employer's national insurance contribution to residential care and nursing homes and hospices in line with the NHS.
 - (b) To ensure the adequate provision of and access to sufficient care for adults with severe learning difficulties.
 - (c) To scrap the two-child benefit cap which applies to children who were born after April 2017, or where an exception applies, as it can drive up poverty for families with three or more children.
 - (d) To create a graduated scale of proposed increased employer's national insurance contributions to accommodate small to medium-sized businesses to mitigate some of the possible crippling effects the proposed higher rate may have.
 - (e) Given the unique set of circumstances farmers find themselves in here in NI as opposed to the rest of the UK, to overturn the proposed changes to Agricultural Property Relief (APR) or at the very least to greatly increase the level at which inheritance tax would apply, thus alleviating the anguish being caused to many farmers and their families.

Resolutions relating to concerns around Asylum

- 4 The CPA, having liaised with Council for Mission in Ireland regarding their concerns over the housing conditions, access to healthcare and access to education, call on Westminster and Irish governments to:
 - (a) Ensure that those seeking asylum have access to these basic amenities to ensure that their needs are met.
 - (b) Regarding Asylum seekers who have been granted leave to remain, we urge a greater degree of joined up thinking from government departments, both to enable a smoother and more people-focused transition between statutory providers and to ensure those who

are granted leave to remain are able to integrate into society and access the necessary social benefits as promptly as possible.

- (c) That the CPA facilitate the church in a two-tier response to the NI Assembly's Health Committees 'Call for Views' on the provision of and access to Palliative and Hospice Care (open until 10 January 2024).

Please note that since the CPA meeting, the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons, announced that the Welfare mitigation payments would be extended for another 3 years on 5 December 2024. The CPA has written to the Minister to thank him and his department for taking these important steps and ensuring that those who have benefited from these migrations will not slip into poverty.