



Opponents of "assisted dying" gather during a vote by members of parliament on a bill establishing the right to medical aid in dying at the National Assembly in Paris July 15, 2026. The placards read "Caring = fraternity - Euthanasia = abandonment." (OSV News/Reuters/Noemie Olive)

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France's bishops are strongly criticizing a "radical choice" made by French lawmakers to legalize "assisted dying."

A watershed vote by the National Assembly July 15 legalized assisted dying, including euthanasia and assisted suicide in certain cases.

Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille and president of the bishops' conference, lamented that "members of parliament have enshrined in French law the possibility of causing death."

"This choice breaks with the long tradition of care whose purpose is to alleviate suffering and accompany each person to the natural end of their life," he said on behalf of the bishops.

The statement, signed by Archbishop Vincent Jordy of Tours and Bishop Benoît Bertrand of Pontoise, deputy presidents of the French bishops' conference, called on Catholic healthcare institutions to "refraining from behavior that is clearly morally reprehensible, in accordance with the dignity of all human life."

For the French bishops, "July 15, 2026, marks a serious turning point in the history of our country."

This is the fourth time since May 2025 that French deputies have voted in favor of the bill legalizing "assisted dying." Senators have overwhelmingly rejected it on three occasions, and the percentage of deputies supporting the bill has dropped significantly since the first vote, but the decline was not sufficient to stop the bill from passing.

On July 15, 291 members of the National Assembly voted in favor, while 241 voted against, with 29 absentees.

The law authorizes assisted dying and, in certain cases, allows a doctor or nurse to administer the lethal substance themselves, making euthanasia legal in France. The

legislation now faces review by France's Constitutional Council before it can take effect.

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The French president warmly welcomed the National Assembly's vote, which was presented as final, in a post on X just after the vote. Emmanuel Macron had openly supported this law. He had personally promised to legalize euthanasia before the end of his second five-year term.

"In 2022, I made a commitment to pave this path with the French people," he said July 15. "That commitment has been fulfilled."

The bishops openly lamented that Macron had arbitrarily sided with the National Assembly's decision, despite the numerous controversies surrounding this bill.

"The President of the Republic had announced a calm, informed, and respectful debate, but it is clear that political, ideological, and undoubtedly even economic considerations, disguised by misleading rhetoric, have thwarted this ambition," the bishops said.

"A question so fundamental to our social contract deserved that the human, medical, ethical, and social consequences of euthanasia and assisted suicide be fully considered."

For the bishops, one of the greatest dangers of the law stems from the fact that the principle that death can constitute a medical response to suffering has now become part of the legal heritage of the country. The choice to die can then be asserted as a right that could be extended to others.

"Experience in other countries shows that the criteria for access to assisted dying always tend to broaden, to the detriment of palliative care," they noted.

Meanwhile, "the effects of such legislation are not yet fully measured, but they are already taking shape," the bishops warned. "Our relationship to vulnerability, old age, disability, and illness will change," they added.

"The poorest are likely to be the first to pay the price: not wanting to be a burden on their children or grandchildren, elderly people in precarious situations may feel

pressured to die," the prelates warned.

For the bishops today, the most immediate and concrete concern is that, if the law goes into effect, care facilities — foremost among them Catholic institutions — could face legal action if they refuse to allow euthanasia or assisted suicide to take place on their premises. As it stands, the law will require the head of the facility or department to authorize outside practitioners to perform the lethal procedure.

The bishops have therefore announced that they will "closely monitor the referrals to the Constitutional Council" that were announced prior to the vote.

On July 14, while France was celebrating Bastille Day — the country's biggest national holiday — Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu surprised many by announcing that he would appeal to the Constitutional Council to submit the text of this law — to which he is personally opposed — for review. He justified this final recourse by citing the lack of agreement between the two chambers, the National Assembly and the Senate. A few days earlier, Senate President Gérard Larcher had announced his intention to take the same step.

The Constitutional Council may approve the entire bill, strike down certain provisions, or issue interpretive reservations before the law is promulgated by Macron. The referral requested by the prime minister will focus in particular on the absence of a conscience clause allowing healthcare facilities — such as the Catholic nursing homes run by the Little Sisters of the Poor — to be legally authorized to refuse to provide such "assisted dying" services on their premises.

Pending the outcome of the appeal, the bishops of France have reiterated their call to Catholics in France to "bear witness that another path is possible — one of faithful presence and attentive care that alleviates physical or psychological suffering, without ever abandoning anyone."