

NJ VOTERS SUPPORT RIGHT-TO-DIE LEGISLATION

By a 46 to 38 percent margin, New Jersey voters support a bill that would allow physician-assisted suicide in New Jersey, according to the most recent results from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind poll. Garden State Democrats and Republicans are about equally likely to support the measure, and the big split among voters seems to be based on religious grounds.

Despite the national media attention the bill has received, most New Jersey residents say that they haven't heard much about it: 55 percent say that they haven't heard or read anything about it at all. This didn't stop respondents from having an opinion on the bill, though: only 15 percent said that they didn't know how they felt about it.

"Most voters simply don't know much about the bill," said Dan Cassino, professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson and an analyst for the poll. "And that means that there's still plenty of room for people on either side of the bill to change people's minds."

Much of the opposition to the bill comes from people who attend church services regularly. About 1 in 3 New Jersey voters (32%) say that they attend religious services at least every week, and only 23 percent of them support the measure. A similar number of voters (33%) in the state go to services only for special occasions, or never: 67 percent of them support the measure. In contrast, support was evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. Half of Democrats (52 percent) support the measure, along with 45 percent of Republicans and 41 percent of independents.

"This is an issue that hasn't really been politicized, at least not in New Jersey," said Cassino. "People can't generally turn to political leaders for advice on how to feel about it, so they're relying on religious views instead."

Interestingly, age does not seem to play a role in determining how people feel about the bill. About half (49 percent) of residents under the age of 60 say that they support the measure, while 40 percent of voters over 60 do. However, that difference can largely be accounted for by the increased religious participation of older New Jersey residents.

“You might think that older voters would oppose the measure,” said Cassino. “But for every older person who is worried about having the plug pulled on them prematurely, there’s another who wants more control over their end of life decision-making.”

Introduced by Assemblyman John Burzichelli (D-Gloucester), the bill would allow patients with less than six months to live to request a prescription for fatal medications. The patient would have to request the drugs three times, including once in writing, and have their request approved by two different doctors. Patients with any psychiatric issues would not be able to get a prescription, and once the drugs were prescribed, the patient would be required to administer the fatal dose to themselves. Hospitals and other health care providers could disallow their doctors from participating in the program. Three other states – Oregon, Washington and Montana – currently allow terminally ill patients to receive fatal doses of medication. Massachusetts voted last month on a ballot issue that would have allowed it, but the voters decided against it, 49 percent to 51 percent. The New Jersey bill was introduced at the end of September, and has yet to be scheduled for a vote.

“The restrictions placed on the New Jersey version of the bill render it mostly symbolic,” said Cassino. “But both sides – perhaps correctly – see it as the opening fight in a much bigger war over what they see as patient rights and the sanctity of life.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 433 registered voters statewide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from October 26 through October 29, 2012, and has a margin of error of +/-4.7 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actualities at 201.692.2846 For more information, please call 201.692.7032*

Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from October 26 through October 29, 2012 using a randomly selected sample of 433 registered voters statewide.

One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of plus or minus 4.7 percentage points among likely voters. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Right to Die Bill

The New Jersey legislature has proposed a bill that would allow people with fewer than six months to live to end their own life with a lethal dose of prescription drugs and the assistance of a doctor. How much have you heard or read about this issue?

	All	Party ID		
		Dem	Ind	Rep
A lot	8%	7	12	8
Some	18%	18	25	13
Just a little	18%	21	14	11
Nothing	55%	54	46	68
Unsure	-	-	2	-

Right to Die Bill Pass/Not Pass

Do you think the state should pass such a bill, or not?

	All	Age				Party ID		
		18-29	30-44	45-59	60+	Dem	Ind	Rep
Should pass	46%	46	51	48	40	52	41	45
Should not pass	38%	37	35	38	43	29	47	40
Don't know	15%	17	14	14	17	18	12	15

	How often do you attend religious services?						
	Weekly	A few times a month	Monthly	A few times a year	Special occasions	Never	Refused
Should pass	23	50	32	59	65	68	57
Not pass	64	40	37	20	22	13	29
Don't know	14	10	32	21	12	18	14

How often do you attend religious services?

	Percent
Weekly	32
A few times a month	14
Monthly	5
A few times a year	14
Special occasions	22
Never	11
Unsure	-
Refused	2

Exact Question Wording and Order

R2D1 The New Jersey legislature has proposed a bill that would allow people with fewer than six months to live to end their own life with a lethal dose of prescription drugs and the assistance of a doctor. How much have you heard or read about this issue?

- 1 A lot
- 2 Some
- 3 Just a little
- 4 Nothing at all
- 9 DK

R2D2 Do you think the state should pass such a bill, or not?

- 1 Should pass
- 2 Should not pass
- 9 DK

Sample characteristics – Registered voters**Gender**

Male	48
Female	52

Age

18-29	13
30-44	26
45-59	29
60+	30
Refused	2

Race/Ethnicity

White	66
Black/African-American	13
Latino or Hispanic	9
Asian	5
Other/refused	7

Public employee household

Yes	23
No	75
Unsure/refused	2

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	49
Independent/DK/refused	18
Republican/Lean Republican	33