

## **OPINION DIVIDED IN GARDEN STATE, BUT MAJORITY SUPPORT DEATH WITH DIGNITY ACT AND WANT LEGAL OPTION FOR THEMSELVES**

For the second time in three years, the New Jersey Legislature is considering a bill that would allow physician-assisted suicide for terminal patients with fewer than six months to live. The most recent statewide poll of New Jersey residents from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind finds a majority of New Jerseyans support the legislation, and are personally comfortable with ending one's life with physician assistance if faced with a terminal illness.

Fifty-one percent say they believe policymakers should pass the legislation that would allow someone to end their own life with the help of a doctor if a terminal illness left them with fewer than six months to live, with little more than a third (38%) opposed. The legislation requires a patient to make two requests, 15 days apart, and be able to administer the legal drugs without any assistance. The numbers are virtually the same when the question turns to what someone would want personally. Fifty-three percent say they would want the legal option to end their own life with the assistance of a physician if they were left with only a short time to live, while four-in-ten say they would not want such an option (39%).

"For many, the 'Death with Dignity Act' raises tough choices, calling into question issues of faith and morality. But the consensus seems to be for personal autonomy in deciding how and when to end one's life when a terminal illness brings the end sooner rather than later," said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Evaluations of the issue, as well as personal preferences, are related to partisanship. Democrats are more likely to support the legislation (60%) and would want the legal option for themselves (60%) than Republicans. Among Republicans, opinion is divided, with 43 percent favoring the legislation compared with 45 percent who disapprove. Similar numbers can be found among Republicans who both want the legal option for themselves (48%) and do not (46%).

"This is an issue which gives individuals greater freedom, but is a freedom that would be regulated by government. This makes it a particularly difficult issue for some Republicans," said Jenkins.

Non-whites support the legislation in numbers that are distinct from whites (41% versus 56%, respectively). And, when the question turns to what someone would want for themselves, non-whites are significantly less likely than whites to want the option personally (29% versus 58%, respectively).

Few are aware of the legislation, however. Only 26 percent are paying "a lot" or "some" attention to the issue. The vast majority (73%) are paying little or no attention to the proposed legislation.

Finally, findings from the recent poll are the same as when the questions were last asked in October 2012, the last time the legislature considered similar legislation. Back then, 46 percent said the legislature should move forward with physician-assisted suicide, a number that's only slightly less than the 51 percent observed today.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 819 New Jersey residents 18 and older was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from July 14 through July 21, 2014, and has a margin of error of +/-3.4 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 July 14 through July 20, 2014 using a randomly selected sample of 819 residents 18 and older. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.4 percentage points. 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 landline 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.

The following tables are based on all respondents in the sample.

### Tables

<i>Do you think the state should pass such a bill, or not?-</i>												
		PID				Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Oct 2012	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Should pass	<b>51%</b>	46	60	47	43	51	50	56	41	45	56	49
Shouldn't pass	<b>38%</b>	38	31	39	45	37	39	34	45	38	36	40
DK/Ref (vol)	<b>11%</b>	15	9	14	12	12	11	10	14	17	8	11

<i>If you were to become terminally ill and have fewer than six months to live, would you or would you not want the legal option to end your own life with the assistance of a physician?</i>												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+	
Would want	<b>53%</b>	60	51	48	53	53	58	29	52	57	51	
Would NOT want	<b>39%</b>	34	38	46	39	40	35	63	43	36	40	
DK/Ref (vol)	<b>8%</b>	6	10	7	9	8	7	8	6	8	9	

*The New Jersey legislature is considering a bill that would allow people with fewer than six months to live to end their 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	Oct 2012	PID			Gender		Race		Age		
			Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
A lot	<b>10%</b>	8	10	11	10	9	11	11	8	5	10	14
Some	<b>16%</b>	18	12	18	20	15	16	18	10	12	12	24
Just a little	<b>20%</b>	18	21	16	22	20	20	22	16	15	23	20
Nothing at all	<b>53%</b>	55	56	54	48	54	53	48	63	65	55	40
DK/Ref (vol)	<b>1%</b>	-	1	1	0	2	1	1	3	3	1	1

### Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 and US2 saved for subsequent release

NJ1 and NJ2 released July 22

EDUC1 through EDUC7 released July 23

*R2D1 The New Jersey legislature is considering a bill that would allow people with fewer than six months to live to end their 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/Refused (vol)

*R2D3 If you were to become terminally ill and have fewer than six months to live, would you or would you not want the legal option to end your own life with the assistance of a physician?*

- 1 Yes, would want
- 2 No, would not want
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

### Sample Characteristics

		<b>N = 819; MoE = +/- 3.4</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%
<b>Age</b>	<i>18-34</i>	28%
	<i>35-59</i>	42%
	<i>60+</i>	27%
	<i>Refused</i>	3%
<b>Race</b>	<i>White</i>	63%
	<i>African American</i>	12%
	<i>Hispanic</i>	16%
	<i>Asian</i>	5%
	<i>Other/Refused</i>	4%
<b>Party (with leaners)</b>	<i>Dem</i>	43%
	<i>Ind/DK/Refused</i>	23%
	<i>Repub</i>	25%