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THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES COMMENDS ASHCROFT DECISION

Washington, DC – November 26, 2001 The executive director of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, Mary Jane Owen, reported that the Board of Directors, due to arrive in Washington DC for their annual fall meeting later this week, will be celebrating the Attorney General's decision to reverse an earlier decision made by Janet Reno. "We were shocked when she reversed the ruling of former Drug Enforcement Administrator, Thomas Constantine in 1997. He had indicated that doctors in Oregon could not legally prescribe controlled substances, such as narcotics, to facilitate assisted suicides. Reno affirmed the federal government had no voice in such a matter. Now that Attorney General John Ashcroft has reversed her ruling informing his new chief of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Asa Hutchinson, that the use of controlled substances in physician assisted suicides falls outside the definition of a legitimate medical purpose."

She continued, "We here in the national office have had to listen to the distressing stories as people with significant disabilities in Oregon are being pressured to save their families' resources and state funds by taking the lethal drugs which will end their lives. Such a 'final solution' has been stressed as a rational alternative to the time and funds required to go through a rehabilitation process which would allow them to continue to be interactive within their community and church."

Janice Benton, NCPD's Director of Programs and Diocesan Relations affirmed, "We have heard and grieved about the terrible social pressures that have been applied to vulnerable and depressed individuals because of Oregon's legalization of assisted suicide. When disabilities develop, people need confirmation that they remain valued and unique people. The tendency when going through such stressful events as an evolving disability is to accept the negative judgments that result from the legalization of suicide."

The Chair of NCPD's Board, Kent Peters, who heads the San Diego Diocese Office for Social Concerns referred to a recent study done at the University of Toronto that indicates that such social pressures are more important than severe pain when individuals accept assisted suicide. "How good it is that this Administration moves toward affirming the value of every human life and away from policies which encourage its destruction."

NCPD was established in 1982 to foster and support the U. S. Bishops' statements on the necessity of creating welcome and justice for all people with disabilities.

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