"What’s Terrible?"

Dear Letters Editor,

It’s not clear why The Bulletin titled Joe Galeota’s recent column as it did ["Terrible," October 11, 2012].

If it’s because the column offered no information about the content of the physician-prescribed suicide referendum, I agree. That is terrible.

If it’s because the author supposedly took no side, and left the clergy to provide the requisite “wisdom” on the issue, that also is terrible. The stakes are too important for responsible persons to either remain on the sidelines or restrict their analyses merely to theological considerations.

If it’s because the author attaches significance to the burdensome “inconveniences” experienced by commuters whose trips are delayed by depressed persons jumping in front of moving trucks or trains, that too is terrible. We should not worry about whether they have “suppers that are very late.”

Mr. Galeota’s presumption is seriously inaccurate. He presumes that the referendum only affects patients who are “in horrible physical pain from degenerative diseases.” In fact, it affects a much wider population of vulnerable patients.

Let’s get serious, and consider just a few of the many secular reasons why voters should defeat this flawed bill.

The referendum shockingly increases the risk of abuse to elders, many of whom do not have loving families and/or have lost their circle of friends and/or have no one to advocate for them. We should consider that Massachusetts had 19,500 reported cases of elder abuse in 2011. There are insufficient elder abuse investigators to keep up with the 54 new cases reported each day. One study has suggested that there are 23.5 unreported cases for every one reported case.

The referendum does not even provide the level of protection required when a person signs a will in Massachusetts (i.e., two disinterested witnesses), and there is absolutely no oversight at the time the lethal drugs would be administered.

The Massachusetts Medical Society, representing more than 24,000 physicians and medical students, opposes the bill. So does the American Medical Society.

Insurance companies, hospitals and governmental medical providers have a clear and compelling financial interest in denying us of adequate end-of-life care.

How much do you trust insurers, hospitals and governments? Unless you answer “with my life,” you should oppose physician-prescribed suicide and vote NO on Question Two.

It would indeed be “terrible” if we allow this referendum to pass!

Thank you.
Very truly yours,
Robert W. Joyce