

Support grows for so-called 'death with dignity' measure

By DON PORTER / KING 5 News

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SEATTLE - A new poll on Washington's Initiative 1000 - the so-called 'death with dignity' initiative - shows likely voters support it by a two-to-one margin.

But the Catholic Church is heavily lobbying against the measure that would allow certain terminally ill adults to obtain lethal prescriptions to end their own lives.

"It certainly is our teaching that all life is sacred and that life is from the moment of conception until natural death," said Sister Sharon Park of the Washington state Catholic Conference.

The poll conducted by Survey USA for KING 5 News shows likely voters support the measure, 54 percent to 26 percent. Support is up three percent from six weeks ago.

"This gives patients, dying patients and their families, the choice of how they're going to die in order to relieve suffering," said Dr. Tom Preston, an I-1000 supporter.

The initiative follows Oregon's lead. Last year, 49 Oregonians died through lethal prescriptions permitted by law.

"Having this choice at the end of her life gave my mom great comfort," said Julie McMurchie of Portland. She says her mother died 15 minutes after taking the medication.

I-1000 says a doctor must determine a patient is terminally ill and will likely die within six months. That diagnosis must be confirmed. Two requests must be made 15 days apart. Two witnesses are required and the patient must take the lethal drugs themselves.

"It's not really suicide," said Preston. "People who are dying are going to die anyway. There's no more treatment that will keep them alive."

Sister Park sees it another way.

"Most of us want to live," said Park. "Why take the life of the one who's suffering rather than control the suffering?"

The Pro I-1000 forces may be ahead in the polls for now, but they take nothing for granted, noting that similar measures in other states always draw big money. That likely means a down-to-the-wire race for I-1000.