

Assisted dying Bill will risk 'culture of suicide', says bishop

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By Victoria Ward

A BILL to legalise assisted dying is the "first step" towards euthanasia and "a culture of suicide", a Roman Catholic bishop has warned.

The Rt Rev Mark Davies, the Bishop of Shrewsbury, said MPs would be introducing a "law of despair" if they voted to let doctors give lethal levels of medication to anyone with only six months to live who showed a "clear and

"settled intention" to end their life. Bishop Davies said "the right to die will quickly become the duty to die".

He said vulnerable people needing the greatest care would consider themselves an unwanted burden on society.

The Bill, introduced by Labour MP Rob Marris, will be given its second reading on September 11, with a vote in the Commons.

A plan to let doctors help the terminally ill kill themselves was rejected by

234 votes to 89 in 1997 but recent polling has consistently shown public support for a change in the law, to allow assisted dying.

Bishop Davies told 800 pilgrims in Lourdes, France: "The proposed law for assisted dying will remove legal protections for the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our land.

"It is the first step on the road to euthanasia." He urged pilgrims to make their opinions heard before MPs choose

between "a culture of care or a culture of suicide and eventually of killing".

The Bill will give a High Court judge a role in any system of assisted suicide, to safeguard the vulnerable - a move likely to strengthen potential support.

The bishop's views echo concerns from David Cameron that the vulnerable terminally ill might feel "unfairly pressurised". Mr Marris said people near death should not be denied medical help to end their lives.