

Religious Freedom Coalition

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***** NEWS RELEASE *****

Religious Freedom Coalition strongly favors passage of The Incapacitated Person's Legal Protection Act

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The Religious Freedom Coalition strongly supports the Incapacitated Persons Legal Protection Act (HR 1151) sponsored by Congressman David Weldon and introduced in the Senate (S 539) by Senator Mel Martinez (R-FL) to ensure that severely disabled individuals have the same legal due process as convicted murderers.

A judge has ordered Terri Schiavo of Florida to die by starvation and dehydration as her loving family watches helplessly at her bedside. Terri has been incapacitated since 1990 and now the court has ordered that beginning on March 18, food and water will be denied to this severely disabled woman. These are the wishes of her guardian, her husband, and she has no counsel independent of him to protect her well being.

Convicted murderers on death row are allowed independent counsel, often paid for by the taxpayers; yet Terri and other severely disabled individuals like her have no legal representation before their lives are ended. In this case there is a dispute between her natural family and her husband. In such cases an attorney should be made available to represent the interests of the disabled who cannot speak for themselves. Terri is not receiving the "due process" promised to all citizens by the Constitution.

Peggy Birchfield, Executive Director of the Religious Freedom Coalition states, "I would not want one of my children to die of court ordered starvation and I am sure no Congressman, no Senator and no one in this room would want one of their children to face such a gruesome end. Terri and those disabled as she is deserve the equal protection under the law that our Constitution promises"

The Religious Freedom Coalition strongly supports the Incapacitated Person's Legal Protection Act, and we believe it should move quickly in the House and Senate to preserve not only the life of Terri but the rights and lives of all severely disabled Americans.

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