



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese
In support of LD 560
An Act to Amend the Safe Haven Laws

Senator Carney and Representative Harnett and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in its strong support of LD 560. The Diocese has a population of over 279,000 Catholics* or one-fifth of the total population of the state of Maine. In addition to its 141 churches organized into 55 parishes, it has 8 elementary schools, one private elementary school, one diocesan high school and one private high school. It also includes one Catholic college, Saint Joseph's College of Maine in Standish.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland advocates for enacting and enforcing laws that create safe communities and promote the common good. This issue is important to Catholics because as people of faith a primary concern is the moral and ethical considerations that should be at the root of our decision making. We all are created in God's image. We all—each of us--possess a basic human dignity. The Catholic Church teaches that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the underpinning of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundational principle of Catholic social teaching.

This bill amends the current the safe haven law to add a safe haven baby box to the list of safe havens that a person may deliver a newborn child to under the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act. A safe haven baby box could be located in a hospital, law enforcement facility or fire department facility that is staffed 24 hours a day by a medical services provider. The installation locations would be completely voluntary and privately funded.

The current Department of Health and Human Services guidelines on safe haven note that confidentiality is key.¹ This is true for other state's safe haven laws as well.² There is a distinction to be made between confidentiality and anonymity. As an adoptee myself, I understand that adoptees may want to know information about his/her birth family. Maine has a way to make that happen: it's called the adoption reunion registry.³

This bill does not change anything about confidentiality or anonymity. A safe haven option already exists. The difference is that a safe haven baby box would allow a mother to avoid physically handing the child to a person. Under the current law, identifying information is not shared and LD 560 would not change that. Everyone knows that Maine is one small town and giving a parent the option to surrender a child without having to talk to someone they might know is a primary goal of installing a safe haven baby box.

¹ https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cw/policy/iv_-c-3_-procedural-guidelines.html

² <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/safehaven.pdf>

³ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cw/adoption/reunionregistry.htm>

Are safe haven baby boxes needed and used? The answer is yes to both those questions. Just last month, a child was found abandoned in a trash bin near Boston.⁴ Reports of infant abandonment and deaths of infants from abandonment throughout the country continues even with safe haven laws in place.

As a parent myself, I know that parents innately want to do what is best for their children. Let's give parents a safe option to surrender without shame or stigma.

Please vote LD 560 as Ought to Pass. Thank you for your time and consideration today.

*www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/maine/

⁴ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/02/26/metro/abandoned-infant-recovered-dorchester/>