



Testimony before the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

LD 227: An Act Regarding Health Care in the State

March 14, 2024

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven mainline Protestant member-denominations and two associate member congregations who represent more than 400 local churches in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in SUPPORT of LD 227.**

It has come to our attention that on Tuesday, March 5, as we were on the 4th floor of the State House testifying in favor of gun safety legislation, your committee hearing was inundated with testimony laced with hatred, transphobia, misogyny, and disinformation—much of it coming from individuals and organizations who claimed to be speaking as or on behalf of people of faith, including two members of the People’s Initiative of New England, an affiliate of NSC-131, a regional neo-Nazi group.

Their strategy to influence your committee members’ votes through intimidation was clear: if we cannot win on the merits, we will win through fear—a strategy revealed even more transparently the next day in the despicable bomb threats made against your co-chairs and the State House.

If we had known all this was going to happen, we would have made arrangements to have a representative of the Council testify before you in support of LD 227 to offer our voice of faith that speaks for love of neighbor, justice for the marginalized, compassion, and peace.

We at the Council were appalled and horrified by the misuse and misrepresentation of Christianity and the Bible during your public hearing by those who viciously attacked the transgender community and argued that those practitioners who offer them safe, legal, standard-of-care medical treatment should be punished.

The Bible does not say that being transgender is wrong. This extremist, wrong-headed belief is based on shaky extrapolations of texts that we and our member denominations hold sacred. The bible *does* say that we must love and care for one another, not degrade and harm each other. “But,” as Union Theological Seminary President Serene Jones has written, “in this legislative onslaught, a biblically false hate-message is the prized weapon of attack. Ultimately, when we look to the Bible for guidance, we have to look at its overarching lessons: love others; treat our neighbors with respect; show compassion. That means respecting, embracing, and loving transgender people.” (Newsweek, January 23, 2023)

The member denominations of the MCC all have deep roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture where covenant with God includes caring for the marginalized, including our transgender siblings who are beloved children of God, created in the divine image.* They are not a category of neighbors that others are permitted to discriminate against, silence, deprive of medical care, attack with hatred and bigotry, or exploit in a quest for winning political points.

*Episcopal Diocese of Maine, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA),
Religious Society of Friends, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church*

Opponents of LD 227 also testified before your committee claiming that the Christian faith is univocal in its condemnation of abortion care. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, a majority of Christians in the United States and in Maine, including Roman Catholics, believe abortion care should remain safe and legal. In opposition to the vocal minority of people of faith who speak against the rights of women to make their own reproductive health care choices, MCC has been on the legislative record in Maine for over 5 years advocating for reproductive justice and safe, legal access to reproductive health care, including abortion (see our testimony on [LD 1619 in 2023](#) and [LD 1261 in 2019](#) for an exposition of our member denominations' beliefs).

LD 227 will protect access to health care that is legal in Maine and will ensure Maine providers can continue to deliver high-quality health care by protecting access for transgender people and for those seeking abortion care. It is a straightforward bill to ensure that Maine law can continue to govern Maine health care. It is a *necessary* bill given the escalating attacks on abortion care and essential health care for transgender people by extremists who are desperate to interfere with personal medical decisions.

For all of these reasons, as people of faith, The Maine Council of Churches supports LD 227 and urges the committee to vote OUGHT TO PASS.

**Here is a sample of MCC's member denominations' statements and policies regarding transgender and nonbinary people:*

- **Presbyterian Church USA** - As a Matthew 25 denomination, we are compelled to celebrate and support transgender and nonbinary youth and their parents within our denomination and beyond. The rash of transphobic and homophobic legislation being introduced and passed across the United States stands in direct opposition to our call to care for those held down by systemic discrimination and oppression. LGBTQIA+ youth are four times more likely to seriously consider suicide, to make a plan for suicide and to attempt suicide than their cisgender, heterosexual peers. They cannot afford for us to remain silent while some make false and dangerous claims about gender-affirming health care for youth. We cannot stand by as legislation is put in place to withhold that which we know has the capacity to not only honor their lived reality, but ultimately save the lives of LGBTQIA+ youth.
- **United Church of Christ** - People of transgender and nonbinary experience are beloved by God and are among the neighbors Jesus commanded his followers to love and treat with worth and dignity that human judgment cannot set aside. Yet, religion is being used in our country to attack them. Anti-trans political forces are trying to criminalize families and doctors as they work to address the trauma of being assigned a gender at birth that is incongruous with the child's or adult's actual gender identity. Criminalizing doctors simply adds more trauma to already vulnerable children.
- **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** - Presiding Bishop Eaton has written that the rights of transgender and nonbinary Americans have been targeted all over this nation. Nearly 400 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills were introduced across the United States in 2022, most of them targeting trans youth. That is twice the number from 2021 and almost eight times the total from 2020. The language in many of these bills attacks the humanity of trans and nonbinary people, often erasing the dignity that should be afforded to everyone. While members of our church hold various convictions regarding gender, the teaching of our church supports legislation and policies to protect every person's human dignity and civil rights. Our church teaches that we affirm transgender and nonbinary siblings as God's children, who are loved unconditionally. This church commits itself to advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them.

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- **United Methodist Church** - Depriving trans youth of medical and psychological care violates the first "general rule" of The United Methodist Church, which is "Do no harm."
- **The Episcopal Church** – The 80th General Convention, which is the highest governing body of the church, passed a resolution endorsing Episcopalians of any age seeking gender-affirming care in medical, social or other settings. It specified that Episcopalians seeking gender-affirming care would be accepted and supported by the church.
- **Unitarian Universalist Association** - Our faith has publicly called for transgender-affirming actions for over three decades and trans, nonbinary, and intersex people are a cherished part of Unitarian Universalism; anti-trans bills use false notions of “religious freedom” and “protecting” women and children as an excuse for discrimination. We affirm that living one’s identity, in terms of gender identity/expression, sex characteristics, and affectional/sexual orientation, is part of our free exercise of religion, and that religious exceptionalism that promotes discrimination abridges human rights and our free exercise of religion. Trans and nonbinary+ people are living in an environment where legislators and policy makers are criminalizing their very existence. Trans children and their parents fear that the state will prevent them from receiving appropriate healthcare or from feeling secure in their families.

Jane Field
Maine Council of Churches
LD 227

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