

Testimony in support of LD 780

Rev. Marvin M. Ellison, Ph.D.
122 Neal Street
Portland, ME 04102

(207) 775-5758
Mellison122@gmail.com

As an ordained Presbyterian minister and now retired professor of Christian ethics at Bangor Theological Seminary, I strongly support LD 780, a proposed amendment to the State of Maine constitution that will offer further protections for the right to reproductive freedom and self-determination.

A Matter of Faith and Values

I support this legislation not in spite of, but *because of* my faith and values. I believe that we humans are created with moral freedom to make conscientious decisions about when and whether to start a family, use contraception, or seek abortion care. That's why I've been honored to serve as a volunteer chaplain for Planned Parenthood. Again and again, I've learned from women and couples that they were seeking abortion care for the same reason that, under other circumstances, they might well have chosen to bring new life into the world: out of love and a deep sense of responsibility to do the right thing. Yes, birthing a child often brings joy, but not always. Sometimes the right thing is to say, with regret, "No, not now."

Human Rights Are Foundational to Human Well-Being

As the preamble to the International Declaration of Human Rights states, "Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." No right is more precious than the right to bodily integrity and self-determination. The freedom to "be secure in one's person" includes the right to decide for oneself about reproductive matters, surely one of life's most tender, vulnerable, and intimate aspects.

Denial of Fundamental Rights Causes Harm

To deny this fundamental moral freedom causes serious moral harm because it takes away people's agency. It is only by exercising our freedom as moral agents, no matter how imperfectly, that we become fully human. Without moral freedom and self-determination, we become subject to control by others and further dehumanized.

Reproductive Rights Are Under Attack

In recent years, reproductive rights have come under increased attack. In 2022 the U.S. Supreme Court rescinded a 50-year Constitutionally protected right to privacy by upending *Roe v Wade*. Subsequently, more than 20 states have enacted legal bans on abortion care. Today, one in three

women do not possess legal access to abortion services as health care. The appalling lack of Constitutional protections for reproductive self-determination has created a personal and social crisis across the nation and placed unnecessary burdens on individuals, their families, and their communities.

Constitutional Rights Grant Stronger Protection

Because any Constitutional amendment must be approved by majority votes in both chambers of the Maine legislature and then by a majority of Maine voters, a Constitutional amendment offers an additional – and welcome – layer of protection for reproductive rights. A constitution is more difficult to change than laws. With this enhanced security, Mainers can reliably expect to be free to make their own, highly personal decisions about their reproductive health and well-being. Happily, the common good, from which we all benefit, will also be strengthened.