



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese in opposition to LD 260

RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in opposition to LD 260. 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 48 parishes, it has nine 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. Within the diocese, there are also seven subsidized housing units, four rehabilitation and residence facilities, and two child-care centers. There are three Catholic hospitals operating independently of the diocese as well as Catholic Charities Maine, the state's largest social service agency, which operates as a separate corporation.

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.

The text of the ERA is simple: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." The language was developed by lawyer and suffrage fighter Alice Paul in 1943, although the equality amendment was first introduced in 1923.

The Diocese of Maine STRONGLY supports equal rights for women. Women are made equal in dignity to men. Women should have equal rights in employment laws, insurance, finance laws, family law and disability laws, etc. However, a woman is not exactly the same as a man. The most obvious difference is that only a woman can bring new life into the world. Children and all people must be protected at every stage and every condition. As previously stated, we all possess a basic human dignity.

The ERA website's frequently asked questions section admits that the ERA has been used in other states to force taxpayer funding for abortions.

"State equal rights amendments have been cited in Connecticut and New Mexico cases dealing with whether a state that provides funding to low-income Medicaid-eligible women for childbirth expenses should also be required to fund medically necessary abortions for women in that program. Those state Supreme Courts ruled that the state must fund both of those pregnancy-related procedures if it funds either one, so that the government cannot use fiscal pressure to influence a woman's exercise of her right to make medical decisions about her pregnancy."

Also according to the ERA website, “In February 2024, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in [*Allegheny Reproductive Health v. Pennsylvania Department of Health Services*](#) said that the state’s ban of Medicaid coverage for abortion is a form of sex discrimination and “presumptively unconditional” under Pennsylvania’s equal rights amendment. It remanded the case to the lower court to decide on the ban’s constitutionality, and in July Governor Josh Shapiro filed notice that his government will not defend the law banning funding because it violates the state constitution.”¹

If this bill were amended to protect unborn children, perhaps the Diocese of Portland could consider supporting it. However, as written, there is nothing equal about a law that could require funding that strips away the right to life for unborn children permanently.
Thank you for your time and consideration today.

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

¹ <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/faq>