



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese in opposition to LD 613

An Act to Amend the Maine Death with Dignity Act to Ensure Access by Qualified Patients

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in opposition to LD 613. 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.

For the Church, there is no distinction between defending human life and promoting the dignity of the human person. As a gift from God, every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. The life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition. The right to life is the first and most fundamental principle of human rights that leads Catholics to actively work for a world of greater respect for human life and greater commitment to justice and peace.

To sanction the taking of innocent human life is to contradict a primary purpose of law in an ordered society. The Maine law permitting assisted suicide demeans the lives of vulnerable patients and exposes them to exploitation by those who feel they are better off dead. The voiceless or marginalized in our society -- the poor, the frail elderly, racial minorities, millions of people who lack health insurance -- are the first to feel pressure to die.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has denounced assisted suicide, calling it a "culture of discarding" the elderly. "Social services pay up to a certain point; if you pass it, 'die, you are very old'. Today, elderly people are discarded when, in reality, they are the seat of wisdom of the society," he said, "The right to life means allowing people to live and not killing, allowing them to grow, to eat, to be educated, to be healed, and to be permitted to die [naturally]."

There is age old wisdom in the adage, time is precious. Time is exactly what cannot be bought or sold, and our health care system no longer invests time in patients because it is not billable. One has to wonder about LD 613, could this be used as a hospital saving measure?

Two weeks of precious time with a loved one cannot be measured in dollars and cents. If pain is the main concern, as proponents state it is, it is well known that pain measures can be taken and are readily used and available.

Maine must not promote a culture of discarding the elderly.

613. I urge you to protect the most vulnerable in our society by voting Ought Not to Pass on LD

I urge you to vote ought to not to pass. Thank you for your time and consideration today.
*www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/maine/