



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese *in support of*

LD 1337 An Act to Amend the Maine Human Rights Act Regarding Female Athletes and Safety in Women's Single-sex Shelters

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 support of the above listed LD. 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 eight 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 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 Diocese of Portland opposes the advancement of gender theory, especially in places where young people are affected. Instead of harmful, unscientific approaches to gender and sexuality, we advocate for practices that help people struggling with gender identity disorders find healing and integration. God created us male or female. Our biological sex is not an accident. It is a gift from God and shapes how we participate in His self-giving love. But gender theory, or transgender ideology, that ignores the gifted reality of male and female continues to spread in our society: in our media and our schools, our laws, and our healthcare standard. The results are disturbing and include psychological distress and self-harm for those indoctrinated into believing that their body and self are at odds with each other.

Most importantly, confusion about how we are made, and our true nature, inhibits our ability to properly relate to one another and, indeed, the whole of creation. As Pope Francis states in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*:

"Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an 'ecology of man', based on the fact that 'man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will'. It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it, and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way, we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and

find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.” (No. 155)

Support for Equity, Safety, and Truth in Education

Catholic teaching affirms the inherent dignity of every human person and the importance of creating safe, respectful environments for all students. Our schools are committed to the well-being of every child, and we unequivocally oppose any form of bullying or harassment. At the same time, policies governing athletics, restrooms, changing rooms, and housing must be rooted in truth and fairness, respecting the biological differences between males and females.

Athletics: Protecting Fairness and Opportunity for Women and Girls

The Catholic Church teaches the equality of men and women and upholds the truth that we are created male and female. This distinction is not only a matter of faith but is also recognized in science and the experience of athletes themselves. Allowing biological males to compete in female sports undermines fairness and can pose safety risks, especially in high-contact sports. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated, “Equal treatment between women and men has particular relevance in athletics, where male competition in activities designated for women and girls can be both unfair and, especially in high-contact sports, unsafe”. These bills would ensure that female athletes can compete on a level playing field, preserving the hard-won opportunities of women and girls in sports.

Restrooms, Changing Rooms, and Housing: Ensuring Privacy and Safety

Provisions for restrooms, changing rooms, and housing are based on biological sex are common sense. This approach protects the privacy and safety of all students, particularly in vulnerable settings where students are undressed. Catholic schools have long recognized the importance of clear guidelines in these areas, not only for safety but also to foster a respectful environment where everyone’s dignity is upheld. These policies are consistent with best practices for child safety and well-being.

Respecting the Rights of All Students

We recognize that some students experience gender identity discordance. The Catholic community is called to accompany these young people with compassion and respect. These bills do not prohibit any student from participating in athletics or other school activities; rather, it ensures that participation in sex-designated activities and spaces is consistent with biological sex, while coeducational and mixed opportunities remain open to all. This strikes a balance between inclusion and fairness.

Alignment with Catholic Mission and Federal Law

The bill aligns with the mission of Catholic education, which seeks the integral formation of the human person—mind, body, and spirit—while bearing witness to the truth about the human person as created by God. It also seeks to comply with Title IX by ensuring that sex-based distinctions are maintained for the purpose of fairness and safety, without denying anyone the opportunity to participate in school life.

Please vote this bill Ought to Pass. Thank you for your consideration.

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