



Grandmothers For Reproductive Rights

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Senator Donna Bailey, Representative Anne Perry, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee ,

My name is Elayne Richard. I am a staff member with Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!), an education and advocacy organization led by grandmothers and elders dedicated to advancing reproductive health, rights and justice for present and future generations. I'm testifying on behalf of GRR! in support of **LD 263: An Act to Ensure Access to Healthcare.**

This bill would ensure that access to healthcare services are not diminished as a result of mergers and acquisitions of secular health care systems by religiously affiliated ones. Of greatest concern to us is the likely decrease in availability to the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services under such mergers. To use Catholic owned healthcare systems as an example, Catholic hospitals follow Ethical and Religious Directives or (ERDs) that are issued and enforced by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The ERDs ban the provision of key reproductive health services, including contraception, sterilization, abortion and infertility services. They also restrict how pregnancy complications and losses are managed, and have been known to refuse emergency contraception to victims of sexual assault¹.

According to a 2020 report by consumer advocacy non-profit Community Catalyst, the growing influence of Catholic-owned hospitals has led to 4 of the 10 largest hospital systems in the U.S. being under Catholic control, operating across 41 states². This same report showed findings that 23% of Maine's staffed hospital beds are already in Catholic facilities. As independent hospitals across our rural state struggle financially, Catholic organizations' market and geographic reach means they are often best positioned to acquire and survive financially, thereby significantly shifting the kinds of care Mainers can access locally.

In a state like Maine, such mergers would disproportionately impact rural and low-income individuals who typically have less ability to travel for care. Whatever our personal beliefs, we can all agree that religious ideology should never curtail Mainers' access to healthcare in the communities where they live. Mainers have, time and time again, voted to support sexual and reproductive healthcare access in our state. This bill would further that objective to ensure meaningful access for all of us. GRR! urges the committee to vote in support of **LD 263: An Act to Ensure Access to Healthcare.**

Thank you for your consideration,
Elayne Richard & GRR!s across Maine

¹<https://healthlaw.org/resource/the-ethical-religious-directives-what-the-2018-update-means-for-catholic-hospital-mergers/>

² <https://www.communitycatalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2020-Cath-Hosp-Report-2020-31.pdf>