



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Comments of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese

Written testimony in opposition to LD 263 –
An Act to Ensure Access to Health Care

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services Committee, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in opposition to LD 263. 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.

It comes as no surprise to any legislator or any member of the public that the Diocese of Portland opposes LD 263. Respect for unborn human life is the foundation of the Church's constant teaching and practice.

However, there are numerous reasons why this LD should be opposed. First: for charity health care reasons. Passage of LD 263 would prevent Catholic hospitals from expanding and offering life-affirming care. This ministry was established for the purpose of serving those at the margins—the poor, especially women and children among the poor.

What does it mean to be a Catholic hospital? One hospital's website answers this question well:

“St. Vincent Charity Hospital is a special place to receive healthcare, with the finest medical programs and most advanced treatments. It is also a Catholic hospital, which means that our caregivers are dedicated not only to caring for the body, but also for the mind and the soul. This is a place where compassion is more than just a word - it is a vision. Inspired by the healing mission of Jesus, our Caregivers strive to treat all people with respect, dignity and care. To provide faith-based health care that marries human compassion with state-of-the-art technology and services.”

Catholic hospitals treat 80 million patients each year and make up 11% of all community hospitals. As abortion advocates are quick to point out, Catholic hospitals are often the only hospitals in rural communities. This is so because they operate not out of a profit motive but out of charity. In 1998, for example, the nation's 637 Catholic hospitals' service to the poor resulted in a \$2.8 billion financial loss. On average, Catholic hospitals provide a wider range of services than other hospitals: nutrition programs, natural family planning classes, geriatric services and HIV/AIDS treatment.

Today this legacy and this mission are being undermined by abortion advocates. For decades they have attempted to force Catholic hospitals to provide abortions or go out of business. In recent years their tactics have become more subtle and LD 263 is an example of this. Abortion activists have also enlisted the support of state and local governments in discriminating against pro-life health care providers. They have intervened in "certificate of need" proceedings to defeat health care facilities that object to abortion.

Second: for process reasons. This is a concept bill that was not amended until Thursday, April 27. Members of the public have no idea how a concept bill works and that it is eventually amended. In order to receive the actual language of the bill, a member of the public has to be on the interested parties list for this committee. Do we really think this is fair to working Mainers? A four-day notice to read, understand and prepare testimony? This is ridiculous.

There are numerous other abortion related bills which will be heard and voted on this session. Taken in complement with each other, if passed, Maine will be a destination state for abortions. What a tragedy this would be. Women deserve better than abortion, Maine deserves better.

Please vote LD 263 as Ought Not to Pass. Thank you for your time and consideration today.

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