



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Comments of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese Written testimony in support of LD 1197 – An Act to Prevent Coerced Abortion

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, 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 LD 1197. The Diocese has a population of over 279,000 Catholics¹ 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 supports this law. Respect for unborn human life is the foundation of the Church's constant social teaching and social justice ministries.

This bill amends the laws governing informed consent to abortion by requiring a health care professional, prior to performing an abortion, to provide to a pregnant minor or pregnant patient orally and in writing, in a language and manner that will be understood by the patient.

Coercion does happen especially when a woman is in an emotional difficult state. Over 60 percent of women who had abortions report high levels of pressure to abort from one or more sources, and those same women report higher levels of subsequent mental health and quality of life issues, according to a new Lozier Institute peer-reviewed study published in the *Cureus* medical journal.¹ There is a need to ensure that women's decision regarding their pregnancy is informed and voluntary, just like for any other procedure or surgery.

Also, it is well established that women who are victims of sex-trafficking have been forced to have abortions, so the bill addresses that concern as well and provides a way for women to get out of that situation and seek justice for the harm done to her. A recent article in *Issues Law Med*, "The Relationship of Abortion and Violence Against Women: Violence Prevention Strategies and Research Needs," states

*The evidence that victims of Intimate Partner Violence are disproportionately represented in women presenting for abortion suggests a need for screening at clinics. Coerced abortion is a form of violence and has occurred by government policy in China and as a result of other violence against women, sex trafficking and war situations.*²

The statistics are clear: many women feel pressured to have an abortion and Maine needs to protect women from this coercion. Please vote LD 1197 as Ought to Pass. Thank you for your time and consideration today.

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

¹ <https://lozierinstitute.org/whose-choice-pressure-to-abort-linked-to-worsening-of-subsequent-mental-health/>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26710370/>

Coyle CT, Shuping MW, Speckhard A, Brightup JE. The Relationship of Abortion and Violence Against Women: Violence Prevention Strategies and Research Needs. *Issues Law Med*. 2015 Autumn;30(2):111-27. PMID: 26710370