



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 254 –

An Act to Update the Sex Education and Consent Curriculum

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in opposition to LD 254. 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 254. 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 parental rights reasons. As Catholics, we believe that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that families are the “privileged community” where children grown in wisdom, stature, and grace ([CCC 2206-2209](#)). Pope Francis has reaffirmed that the Catholic Church’s view of parents as the primary educators of children, and schools-Catholic and non-Catholic-as partners in the educational process. The Church counsels Catholics to work with public authorities to ensure and protect parental rights. In the Holy Father’s words, “Schools do not replace parents, but complement them.”

“Parents have the right to ensure that their children are not compelled to attend classes which are not in agreement with their own moral and religious convictions. In particular, sex education is a basic right of the parents and must always be carried out under their close supervision, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them.” (Article VC, Catholic Charter of the Rights of the Family). Effective sexuality education must broadly address “how we love and how we connect to one another” and not be limited to biological information about certain behaviors. Catholics take our vocations as the primary teachers of our children seriously.

Second: for process reasons. This is a concept bill that was not amended until recently. 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 or reach out to a legislator directly and hope to receive a response. Do we really think this is fair to working Mainers? As of the morning before this public hearing, there is still no language listed online. No notice to read, understand and prepare testimony? This is ridiculous.

Please vote LD 254 as Ought Not to Pass. Thank you for your time and consideration today.

[*www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/maine/](http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/state/maine/)