



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

510 Ocean Avenue
Portland Maine 04103-4936

Telephone: (207) 773-6471
Facsimile: (207) 773-0182

Suzanne C. Lafreniere, JD
Office of Public Policy

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

Written testimony in support of **LD 1054** –

An Act To Advance Palliative Care Utilization in the State

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in support of LD 1054. 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 55 parishes, it has 8 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.

For the Church, there is no distinction between defending human life and promoting the dignity of the human person. As a gift from God, every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. The life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition. The right to life is the first and most fundamental principle of human rights that leads Catholics to actively work for a world of greater respect for human life and greater commitment to justice and peace.

With its emphasis on compassionate care and treatment palliative care is fully consistent with the Catholic moral tradition. Popes from John Paul II to Francis have called out the importance of palliative care in addressing the suffering of the seriously ill.

"Palliative care is an expression of the truly human attitude of taking care of one another, especially of those who suffer. It is a testimony that the human person is always precious, even if marked by illness and old age." [Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Academy for Life](#), March 5, 2015 ¹

Persons facing serious illness and persons approaching the end of life should receive care that is compassionate, competent, and that addresses the needs of the whole person — body, mind, and spirit. They have a right to expect care that begins with advanced planning and includes full information about their health condition; active participation in decisions about their care; high quality medical, nursing and psycho-social services that includes relief of pain and other symptoms; and attention to spiritual needs that helps them find meaning and peace of mind in the face of their illness. Palliative care supports persons who are seriously ill as well as their families and caregivers.

Palliative care is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of a serious illness – whatever the diagnosis – with the goal of improving quality of life for both the patient and the family. It is provided by a team of palliative care-trained specialists, including a physician, nurse,

¹ https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco_20150305_pontificia-accademia-vita.html

social worker, chaplain and other care specialists, who work with a patient's physician to provide an extra layer of support and care coordination. Palliative care is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness and can be provided together with curative treatment.

Palliative care has been shown to lower health care costs through reduced emergency room visits, time in the hospital and use of intensive care services. A 2018 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine*, found that palliative care can cut overall hospital costs by \$3,237 per patient. These results are pronounced when the patient has received the palliative care within three days of hospital admission, the researchers said.^{2 3}

Increasing access to palliative care to Mainers is a noble goal for numerous reasons. I urge you to Vote Ought to Pass on LD 1054.

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

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2678833?resultClick=1>

³ <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-care-news/articles/2018-04-30/study-palliative-care-reduces-hospital-stay-cost-of-sickest-patients>