



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese
in support of LD 560
An Act to Amend the Safe Haven Laws

Senator Carney and Representative Harnett, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Suzanne Lafreniere and I represent the Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland in its support of LD 560. 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.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland advocates for enacting and enforcing laws that create safe communities and promote the common good. This issue is important to Catholics because as people of faith a primary concern is the moral and ethical considerations that should be at the root of our decision making. We all are created in God's image. We all—each of us--possess a basic human dignity. The Catholic Church teaches that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the underpinning of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundational principle of Catholic social teaching.

The text of the ERA is simple: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." The language was developed by lawyer and suffrage fighter Alice Paul in 1943, although the equality amendment was first introduced in 1923.

When, under the amendment process, it was approved in 1972 by two-thirds of the members of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, a deadline for ratification by the states was inserted—at first seven years, then extended to 10 years. The ratification fell three states short of the 38 needed, and in 1982, the ERA was declared dead.

There are now two paths that the ERA coalition is trying: One approach is to gain the final three ratifications and amend the original congressional time limit; the other is to "start over" with a vote in Congress and gather 38 new state ratifications.

The Diocese of Maine **STRONGLY** supports equal rights for women. Women are made equal in dignity to men. Women should have equal rights in employment laws, insurance, finance laws, family law and disability laws, etc.

However, a woman is not exactly the same as a man. The most obvious difference is that only women can bring new life into the world. Children and all people must be protected at every stage and every condition. As previously stated, we all possess a basic human dignity.

The ERA website's frequently asked questions section admits that the ERA has been used in other states to force tax payer funding for abortions. "State equal rights amendments have been cited in a few state court decisions (e.g., in Connecticut and New Mexico) regarding a very specific issue – whether a state that provides funding to low-income Medicaid-eligible women for childbirth expenses should also

be required to fund medically necessary abortions for women in that government program. Those courts ruled that the state must fund both of those pregnancy-related procedures if it funds either one, in order to prevent the government from using fiscal pressure to exert a chilling influence on a woman's exercise of her constitutional right to make medical decisions about her pregnancy."¹

If this bill were amended to protect unborn children, perhaps the Diocese of Portland could consider supporting it. However as written, there is nothing equal about a law that could require funding that strips away the right to life for unborn children permanently.

Maine should stand up for its most vulnerable citizens and follow the lead of other states this session. Virginia just narrowly defeated its proposed ERA bill this past month.²

Thank you for your time and consideration today.

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

¹ <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/faq>

² https://www.richmond.com/news/virginia/government-politics/general-assembly/va-house-gop-defeats-last-ditch-effort-to-force-era/article_c21b30ce-e6b2-582d-8e13-77022805a7ae.html