



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Comments of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Catholic Diocese

Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine, 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 expressing deep concern for the proposed proposal under consideration today. The Diocese has a population of over 193,000 registered Catholics or one-seventh of the total population of the state of Maine. In addition to its 141 churches organized into 55 parishes, it has 10 elementary schools, one private elementary school, one diocesan high school and two private high schools. It also includes one Catholic college, Saint Joseph's College of Maine in Standish.

Please reject LDs 368, 369, 632, 722, 1035, 1036, 1037 and any proposal that would take away much needed support to underprivileged families.

Throughout our nation's history the Catholic Church has consistently welcomed and ministered to immigrants. A wonderful example is the story of the late eighteenth century Mission of Our Lady of the Rosary where vulnerable and poor young Irish women, arriving by ship in New York, were given safe shelter and job training. Today, Catholic social service programs, schools, and parishes continue that same outreach. In meeting immigrants face to face, the Catholic Church confronts firsthand the pain and problems resulting from a broken immigration policy. We cannot stand by in silence and allow budget decisions to hurt needy people.

Again as you know, general assistance is by and large a refuge of last resort for individuals and families in crisis. When they come to their municipality to apply for GA they are likely on the brink of homelessness, facing hunger, or other similar catastrophic event. Where will they turn to now? Chances are they have already explored all other options and consequently they have no other place to turn to. There is no doubt in my mind, nor should there be in yours, that many of these same people will end up homeless and at the mercy of soup kitchens, adding yet additional numbers to what already are unprecedented utilization of these resources. I can assure you that our churches are already doing all that is humanly possible to meet the needs of those in need. We are stretched to our limit and it is inconceivable that churches throughout the State could meet the increased demand that would result if these bills are adopted.

All people have a right to live in freedom and lead productive lives free of persecution and poverty, but when that isn't possible, they have a right to migrate to other nations. Conversely, it is our obligation as a fundamentally prosperous nation to accept them graciously and welcome them among us.

At this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis reminded us, "The Lord says: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' (*Mt* 25:35-36). The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind."

In his latest writing, “The Joy of the Gospel” our Holy Father, Pope Francis wrote, “The individual today is often suffocated between two poles represented by the State and the marketplace. At times it seems as though he exists only as a producer and consumer of goods, or as an object of State administration. People lose sight of the fact that life in society has neither the market nor the State as its final purpose, since life itself has a unique value which the State and the market must serve.” (#49). What Pope Francis is reminding us is that each person is made in the image and likeness of God and as such deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

Again, I ask you to please reject LDs 368, 369, 632, 722, 1035, 1036, 1037 and any proposal that would take away much needed support to underprivileged families.