



Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland

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Office of Public Policy

Testimony of Suzanne Lafreniere, on behalf of the Roman Catholic Diocese in opposition to LDs 36, 219 and 220

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson, 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 cuts outlined in LDs 36, 219 and 220. 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 10 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.

Please reject the proposals in these three bills that would affect vulnerable people, especially families with children.

Drastic changes to TANF and general assistance benefits would have severe consequences for children in Maine. I urge you to consider the effect these cuts would have on so many families. Let me be very clear: Catholics in Maine do what we can to help feed the hungry, but these cuts could not be absorbed by community resources. Parish food banks, soup kitchens and Catholic Charities Maine can only do so much. Catholic Charities Maine runs 24 food pantries in Aroostook County alone.¹ The cuts are too large and drastic. Please keep in mind that even before these cuts, 1 in 4 Maine children is food insecure.²

In past remarks to the diplomatic press corps, Pope Francis said, "Peace is also threatened by every denial of human dignity, firstly the lack of access to adequate nutrition. We cannot be indifferent to those suffering from hunger, especially children, when we think of how much food is wasted every day in many parts of the world immersed in what I have often termed "the throwaway culture". Unfortunately, what is thrown away is not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves, who are discarded as "unnecessary". (1/13/14, Diplomatic Corps)

Please vote ought not to pass on LDs 36, 219 and 220.

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

¹ <https://www.ccmaine.org/food-bank>

² <https://www.gsfb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Food-Pantry-Report-ES-2-6-17.pdf>