



Testimony before the Committee on Judiciary

LD 1619 An Act To Improve Maine's Reproductive Privacy Laws

May 1, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, a resident of Portland, an ordained Presbyterian (PCUSA) minister, and the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, an ecumenical coalition of seven member-denominations (Episcopal, Lutheran (ELCA), Presbyterian (PCUSA), Quaker, Unitarian Universalist, United Methodist and United Church of Christ) who represent 437 local congregations in Maine with 55,000 members in their care. The Maine Council of Churches **supports** LD 1619.

I am likely not the only Christian you will hear from today. And while I respect the right of those Christians who oppose this bill to be here representing *their* interpretation of Christianity, let me be perfectly clear: *their* interpretation is not mine, nor is it that of the Maine Council of Churches. And their views about abortion are not the only conclusions thoughtful people of faith can reach. My own denomination, for example, has advocated for reproductive justice since 1970, *before* *Roe v. Wade*, understanding the termination of a pregnancy to be a matter of a careful ethical decision by the patient, in consultation with medical professionals, that should not be restricted by law.

A majority of Christians here in Maine and across the United States believe abortion should be safe and legal, and in recent years, we at the Council of Churches have consistently advocated in the Maine state legislature for protecting the right of people in Maine to access reproductive health care that includes abortion. We believe no one should be forced to remain pregnant against the advice of their doctor. We affirm the ability of pregnant people to make good moral decisions and believe the decision to end a pregnancy can be a moral decision.

Abortion is a complex health care and moral issue requiring sensitive medical, ethical and spiritual discernment in each unique situation. We take seriously the complexities of specific lives and circumstances and honor the dignity and agency of pregnant people. We appreciate the need for nuance and humility when considering the moral agency of others, and believe that what we, as people of faith, have to offer our world is not a set of simplistic answers to life's difficult questions—rather, we are called to offer compassion, mercy, and advocacy for access to health care, including reproductive health care, as a basic human right.

Six of the Protestant denominations who are members of the Maine Council of Churches have explicit pro-reproductive justice stances in their policies. Judaism is clear in its interpretation of Hebrew scripture: a fetus does not have the status of a human life or personhood (Exodus 21: 22-25). The bible (neither Hebrew nor Christian scripture) hardly speaks anything straightforward into the intensely personal realm of when human life begins or what decisions should be made in complicated, real-world situations involving pregnancy or abortion.

And no one religion's doctrines about abortion belong in state or federal law. The U.S. Constitution prohibits the establishment of a state religion, and our laws should not favor one faith tradition's interpretation over any other tradition's, including when it comes to abortion. The teachings about abortion of faith traditions such as evangelical or Roman Catholic Christianity should not become law, for example. That would favor one religion over others and that is unconstitutional. If access to abortion care remains safe and legal, a matter of moral,

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medical, and spiritual discernment made by a pregnant person and their doctor, there would be no prohibition for an evangelical Christian or Roman Catholic person (or anyone else) to decide *not* to have an abortion. However, if their faith traditions' doctrines were the law of the land, the rest of us would be prohibited from exercising our own moral agency based on *our* religious traditions' belief that deciding *to* have an abortion can be a moral decision.

Ultimately, neither we, as “the Church,” nor any other religion, nor you, as the government, have the wisdom or authority or medical expertise to decide what is best for a pregnant person in a specific situation. Our state laws should protect the privacy of those who are pregnant so that they can make those decisions in consultation with their medical care provider and in the light of their own spiritual practice. With access to safe, quality health care that includes the option of abortion, they will be empowered to build the lives and families they envision, to decide when and whether to parent, and to be able to receive necessary medical procedures from their own physicians whom they know and trust, including later in pregnancy when abortion care may be required to treat miscarriage, pregnancy loss, fetal anomaly, and other maternal health issues.

Maine’s laws protecting access to abortion care, as good as they are, are inadequate for pregnant people and the providers who care for them. Our state currently requires families in the midst of unimaginable pain and crisis to travel out of state for abortion care late in pregnancy because our current laws fall short and don’t account for the full spectrum of medical reasons one might have for ending a pregnancy.

Passage of this bill will be a step toward correcting injustices in access to care, in part by placing trust in pregnant people and their medical teams to make private medical decisions without interference from politicians (and without interference from religious traditions they do not practice). This bill supports the rights and freedoms of bodily autonomy; it will help patients access the care they need throughout a pregnancy; and it will permit trained providers to offer that care right here in Maine.

For all these reasons, the Maine Council of Churches urges you to vote “Ought To Pass” on LD 1619.