



DIOCESE OF MAINE

THE RT. REV. STEPHEN T. LANE

143 STATE STREET, PORTLAND, MAINE 04101-3799

TEL. 207 772-1953 FAX 207 773-0095

April 22, 2009

Testimony Regarding L.D. 1020, "An Act to End Discrimination in Civil Marriage and Affirm Religious Freedom"

Submitted by the Rt. Rev. Stephen T. Lane, IX Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Presented by Cn. Heidi Shott, Canon for Communications and Social Justice, Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Good afternoon Senator Bliss and Representative Priest and each member of the Judiciary Committee.

I stand in support of the L.D. 1020, "An Act to End Discrimination in Civil Marriage and Affirm Religious Freedom." I write as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine, a diocese of The Episcopal Church, but this testimony is my own and does not represent a decision by the Diocese of Maine.

The Episcopal Church has been engaged in a decades' long conversation about human sexuality and the church. We have some practice in this. I have participated in discussions for more than twenty years and think the outcomes of those conversations may benefit the dialogue we're engaging in today.

The Episcopal Church, long ago, concluded and publicly proclaimed through its own legislative body that gay and lesbian persons are children of God and, by baptism, full members of the church. We have also concluded that sexual orientation, in and of itself, is no bar to holding any office or ministry in the church, as long as the particular requirements of that office or ministry are met. And we have repeatedly affirmed our support for the human and civil rights of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered persons. In many of our congregations, both here in Maine and around the country, faithful same sex couples and their families are participating in the life of the church and sharing in the work of ministry and service to their communities.

If we, as Mainers, believe that faithful, lifelong monogamous relationships are among the building blocks of a healthy and stable society, then it is in our interest to extend the rights and obligations of civil marriage to all Maine citizens. To deny those rights to certain persons on the basis of sexual orientation is to create two classes of citizens and to deny one group what we believe is best for them and for society.

The Episcopal Church continues its conversations about doctrine in relation to same sex marriage and the blessing of same sex relationships, and there is yet no consensus. We continue to search for ways to honor the varied viewpoints of all our members and to provide a place of dignity and respect for each of them. Therefore, I also affirm that part of L.D. 1020 that states there will be no effort to compel or coerce any minister to act in a way contrary to his or her belief and conscience. There will certainly never be any requirement in the Episcopal Diocese of Maine to act in contravention of conscience or of church doctrine. It is my expectation that The Episcopal Church will continue to engage in this conversation for some years, even as I hope the rights and responsibilities of civil marriage will be extended to all Maine citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony.