

Maine Episcopal Public Policy Network

2023 Legislative Review

October 13, 2023

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

LD 2 – An Act to Address Maine’s Housing Crisis (Support)

All our churches have roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture, where the foundation of morality is love of neighbor as self and where covenant with God includes caring for our vulnerable and marginalized neighbors while building a society where people nurture and protect one another and ensure that everyone has a safe place to dwell. The biblical moral imperative for justice compels us to go beyond compassion and charity and respond to the homelessness crisis by empowering people to move from homelessness to hope. The bill would provide funding for 24-hour supportive services that make “Site-based Housing First” a successful solution for the most vulnerable Mainers who have complex needs and experience chronic homelessness in both rural and urban parts communities in our state.

The Governor included this bill in the budget which was signed into law on July 12th, 2023.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

LD 928 – Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution to Establish a Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment (Support)

We must prioritize lasting environmental protection and ongoing climate action. Maine’s natural resources: our forests, minerals, aquifers, and marine waters are prime targets for out-of-state extractive and commercial-sized industries and must be managed, preserved, and protected for all people in Maine, including future generations. Maine people entrust the stewardship of these natural resources to policymakers at every level of government, yet our environmental laws and regulations can be weakened or overturned as administrations and legislatures change. The discovery of toxins like PFAS seeping through our farmlands and waters shows the vulnerability of our environment, the need to uphold its integrity, and the gaps in our current legal protections.

Constitutionally protected environmental rights provide the strongest foundation on which to build a resilient and sustainable Maine for today and the future. The Pine Tree Amendment (PTA) would require the government at all levels to protect rights to a clean and healthy environment. The PTA would provide guidance to lawmakers and state agencies and ensure that our laws and regulations are interpreted, applied, and enforced in service to that constitutional obligation, assuring government accountability.

LD 928 has been carried over to the next session.

LD 993 – An Act to Facilitate Stakeholder Input Regarding Forest Policy in Maine (Support)

This bill aims to create a Forest Advisory Board that will support stakeholder input on forestry practices. This is an advisory board, and more than 90 advisory boards currently exist in Maine. As the most forested state in the country, this advisory board makes sense. New Hampshire has had one for more than several decades, and 15 other states also benefit from having a Forest Advisory Board.

LD 993 has been carried over to the next session.

LD 1156 – An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Promote the Design, Development, and Maintenance of Trails (Support)

This bill will establish a \$30 million Maine Trails Bond for outdoor recreation and active transportation. Maine has the potential to be a top-tier state in the nation with multi-use trails that support activities that contribute to our economy, environment, and quality of life. In every corner of the state, Maine trails are a critical resource for connecting Maine people and visitors with the natural world and for reaching destinations to work and play.

LD 1156 has been carried over to the next session.

LD 1246 – An Act to Include Endangered and Threatened Species in the Definition of “Significant Wildlife Habitat” Under the Natural Resources Protection Act (Support)

Maine must consider potential impacts to endangered and threatened species habitat during the permit review process for all projects, not just those over 20 acres. This bill will help expand the circumstances in which the MDEP, Maine’s primary environmental permitting agency, consults with the MDIFW on strategies to avoid or minimize impacts to endangered and threatened species habitat. Often, small modifications to how or when a specific project is designed or built can result in more favorable outcomes for vulnerable species in the area, while still allowing the development to proceed. It is extremely rare for a permit to be denied based on these reviews.

The Governor signed this bill into law on June 12, 2023.

LD 1621 – An Act Regarding Environmental Justice (Support)

In Maine and across the world, climate change and environmental concerns pose the greatest threats to communities that are already marginalized, overburdened, or underserved. For example, people who live in substandard housing, who are experiencing homelessness, or who lack access to reliable transportation are more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather caused by climate change. Because climate change and environmental hazards are inextricably linked to equity, solutions must be, too.

Over several years, entities including the Maine Climate Council and its Equity Subcommittee, the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, and the prior Legislature — as well as many Maine people, and organizations — have acknowledged the urgency of equitably addressing the climate crisis. Just last year, environmental justice legislation was enacted into law, with the full support of this committee and of the Department of Environmental Protection before being removed from the books during the appropriations process. Hence, Maine still lacks a legal framework to ensure that environmental policies are developed, implemented, and enforced in close partnership with the communities impacted “first and worst” by environmental and climate threats.

Maine needs processes and definitions to consider environmental justice and to ensure the thoughtful distribution of benefits and mitigation of burdens as we implement the strategies of Maine Won’t Wait, the State’s four-year plan for climate action. Current structures and actions are insufficient and cannot be improved without adequate staffing and leadership.

LD 1621 has been carried over to the next session.

LD 3 – An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the Covid Pandemic Relief Program (Support)

In recent weeks, we at the Council have heard from many local clergy and lay leaders around the state who are profoundly troubled by the daily phone calls and visits they're receiving from Maine families desperate and afraid they will be losing their housing on December 31. Families with children. Pregnant mothers-to-be. People recovering from surgery. Terrified, they will be turned out into the freezing cold with nowhere to go. Our state's shelters are full. So are our warming centers. Some churches are scrambling to get permission to provide emergency accommodations in their own buildings so that their frightened neighbors will at least have somewhere to get out of the weather for a few nights if they become homeless just ten days from now—but that's not a workable nor a long-term solution for these families.

With the end of eviction moratoria and emergency rental assistance, in over 100 cities and towns across Maine, more than 8,500 households are in danger of being impacted. People across the state are receiving eviction notices when it is bitter cold. These are our neighbors, and they need us. They need you, the leaders of our state, to wade into the midst of the terror of this looming humanitarian crisis and offer the immediate, humane, compassionate solution of the \$21 million of funding for short-term emergency housing that LD 3 would provide.

The Governor signed this bill into law on January 4th, 2023.

LD 1964 – An Act to Create the Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program (Support)

The Episcopal Church (the "Church") supports a uniform paid family leave policy across our Church, and that this is a justice issue which we are obligated as Christians to support all workers, including LGBTQ+ and families of color and advocate without further delay.

The Church believes that the birth or adoption of a child is a cause of celebration for parents, family and the entire community and that an entire inclusive community has responsibility for supporting a family in raising a child; and that family members, inclusive of chosen family, often need to care for one another in sickness, and that this care and ministry serves to give confidence of your loving care; and that individuals suffering from illness may not be able to work for a period of time.

The Church recognizes that the federal and state governments have a role in ensuring those who are sick are cared for, and that all have sufficient healthcare, enough to eat, adequate housing, and that illness does not economically devastate families. We call on the government to institute a funding mechanism for citizens to take paid family leave to care for a newborn child, a foster or adopted child, or immediate family members who require care during illness, as well as fully providing paid sick leave possible.

The Governor included this bill in the budget which was signed into law on July 12th, 2023.

LD 22 – An Act to Impede the Transfer of Firearms to Prohibited Persons (Support)

Most religious Americans believe gun reform is necessary to save lives. Religious Americans overwhelmingly support commonsense policies aimed at gun violence prevention. One study found that most Americans affiliated with a religious community – 84 percent of Buddhist, Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslims – support background checks for all gun sales. The Episcopal Diocese of Maine supports this bill which creates a Class D crime for anyone who knowingly or intentionally sells or transfers a firearm to a person whom the seller/transferor either knows or has reason to believe is prohibited from having a firearm under 15 MSRA Section 393. This proposed legislation increases gun safety in the state by trying to ensure that prohibited persons do not possess firearms.

The Governor signed this bill on June 26th, 2023.

LD 52 – An Act to Allow Certain School Employees to Carry Firearms on School Property (Oppose)

The Episcopal Church has advocated at least since the 1970s for legislation seeking to reduce the risk of gun violence in the United States. Decades later, we see gun violence continuing daily, in communities with high rates of violence, especially in communities of color, in domestic disputes and in violence against women, in suicides, and in mass shootings in night clubs, churches and schools.

We believe guns in schools are an unnecessary and significant threat to the safety of children. Schools should be a haven from violence. The tragedies that took place at Sandy Hook, Robb Elementary, Columbine, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Virginia Tech, and other schools across the US have demonstrated the devastating effect guns have on our school communities. Calls to arm teachers will only lead to more gun deaths and injuries, not fewer.

There is no reason to believe such proposals will help curb those instances of gun violence at school. Teachers are not trained law enforcement officers—their purpose is to be educators. Arming teachers introduces risks to students and staff, as well as school districts themselves. These include the risk of teachers accidentally shooting themselves or students and fellow staff. There are also moral and legal risks associated with improper or inaccurate defensive use of a firearm – even for teachers who have undertaken specialized firearms training.

LD 52 failed in the legislature.

LD 60 – An Act to Require a 72-Hour Waiting Period After the Sale of a Firearm (Support)

In Maine, where no pre-purchase license is required to buy a gun, this bill's post purchase waiting period provides a critical "time buffer" to give an impulsive, angry, or suicidal buyer 72 hours to settle down. Gun purchase waiting periods reduce the number of firearm deaths. States that have licensing or post-purchase waiting period laws have substantially lower firearm suicide percentages and total lower suicide rates than states without such laws.

Although a similar waiting period bill failed to pass in an earlier Maine legislative session, the need to address the recent alarming increase in firearm suicides by Maine youth and Maine veterans, and changing attitudes among gun owners about the importance of keeping guns from those who are dangerous to themselves or others, may cause this bill, this year, to succeed. Its passage would save dozens of Maine lives every year.

LD 60 failed in the legislature.

LD 168 – An Act Regarding Criminal Background Checks for the Sale, Transfer, or Exchange of Firearms (Support)

Under current law, people who sell guns privately, through advertising, including online, and at gun shows or anywhere else without a federal dealer's license can transfer firearms without having to run any background check on the buyer. This means that unless state law requires a background check for these sales, people convicted of felonies, domestic abuse and other prohibited persons who cannot legally buy guns can easily buy them.

This bill will require background checks for private sales, subject to certain exceptions. It provides that the first offense for knowingly selling, transferring, or exchanging a firearm in violation of the criminal background check required is a civil violation for which the penalty is a fine of up to \$1,000 and subsequent offenses is a Class D crime.

This bill will help stop out-of-staters from buying guns in Maine. We believe private sale background checks can prevent suicides and shootings and do not violate the second amendment. As stated above, nationwide and in Maine, voters want background checks with private gun sales. The bottom line is expanding background checks to private sellers will save lives.

LD 168 failed in the legislature.

LD 1557 – An Act to Increase and Enhance School Safety by Allowing Individuals with Concealed Carry Permits to Possess Handguns on School Property (Oppose)

Episcopalians have joined the nation in prayer for the 533 American children under the age of 17 who have died by guns since the start of 2023 and the 1,286 who have been injured while attending school. According to a Pew Research report released this month, gun deaths among America's children increased by 50% between 2019 and 2021. Last year marked the deadliest year in American schools since 1999.

There is no doubt that our schools need to be made safe and secure. We believe that the presence of more guns makes us less safe. The best means of deterring gun violence is to ensure that there are fewer and less-lethal guns.

Most religious Americans believe gun reform is necessary to save lives and overwhelmingly support commonsense policies aimed at gun violence prevention. For example, one study found that most Americans affiliated with a religious community – 84 percent of Buddhist, Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, and Muslims – support background checks for all gun sales.

LD 1557 failed in the legislature.

LGBTQ+

LD 678 – An Act to Require Parental Approval for Public School Employees to Use a Name or Pronoun Other than a Child's Given Name or Pronoun Corresponding to the Gender of the Child's Birth Certificate (Oppose)

All the MCC churches have roots in Hebrew and Christian scripture, where the foundation of morality is love of neighbor as self and where covenant with God includes caring for the most vulnerable and marginalized of our neighbors, including and especially our LGBTQ+ siblings who are beloved children of God, created in the divine

image. We believe sexual orientation and gender identity are a gift from God—not a condition that needs treatment, not a choice that needs conversion, not something broken that needs repair, not a sin that needs forgiveness, and certainly not a category of neighbors that others are permitted to discriminate against, silence, or claim that their children need to be “protected” or “shielded” from.

Among us on the Council’s Board of Directors are three members of the LGBTQ community and several parents of LGBTQ sons and daughters; in the pulpits and pews of our 437 congregations are cherished colleagues and parishioners who are LGBTQ. This bill is about surveillance and attacking transgender people and using hatred and bigotry to exploit a vulnerable population in a quest for winning political points. They are about denying students’ rights, including the right to privacy and safety.

As people of faith, we are impelled by the example of Jesus to treat all persons with love and dignity and especially to care for those who are marginalized by society. The Maine Council of Churches stands opposed to LD 678 and urges you to vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS.

LD 678 failed in the legislature.

LD 930 – An Act to Allow Only Students of Female Gender to Participate in Women’s and Girl’s Sports (Oppose)

As people of faith, united in our belief that every human being is a child of God, created in the image of God and beloved by God, we promote the full humanity and dignity of every person. We call for the full civil, political, and economic rights of people of all races, creeds, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Sex assigned at birth is not necessarily an accurate predictor of the true identity a person lives into. We celebrate a person’s discovery of their true gender identity and the ability of medical science to assist in that process of living into that identity. There is no justification for treating any person in a manner contrary to that identity, regardless of what a birth certificate may indicate. We believe that God blesses anyone who is able to live into their true identity.

We therefore believe that school sports should welcome transgender people for reasons including the following: We know that athletic participation provides all sorts of positive effects on children and young adults, from reduced rates of depression to positive physical health outcomes. But more importantly, high school and college sports are a common space for community-building. By excluding transgender girls from these spaces, it sends a clear message to all trans kids that they don’t belong. It also teaches all children that their transgender peers deserve derision and exclusion that can even lead to deadly violence against trans people.

These bills irresponsibly pit students against each other and schools against their own policies and creeds. Schools across the country know that transgender students, like all students, thrive when they are treated with dignity and respect. When school officials recognize that a transgender girl is a girl during the school day, but then treat her as if she’s a boy when sports practice starts, it is hurtful to the student and disrupts the school’s policy of treating all kids fairly. It’s not an either/or scenario. We can celebrate girls’ sports and not discriminate against transgender children, and make sure that young people can thrive and excel. We can protect fairness, equity, and inclusion for everyone.

LD 930 failed in the legislature.

LD 51 – An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements (Oppose)

LD 1098 – An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions Regarding Immunization Requirements (Oppose)

LD 1209 – An Act to Reinstate the Religious and Philosophical Vaccine Exemptions for Private and Virtual Public Charter Schools (Oppose)

(Testimony for all three bills.) The coronavirus pandemic reminded us yet again, as does every challenge and trial we experience, that our lives are interconnected. Our physical health, our spiritual well-being, the political and economic health of our societies - all are interconnected. What affects one affects all.

Episcopalians affirm and proclaim this truth in our baptismal covenant when we respond, "I will, with God's help," to these two questions: "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?" "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?"

Because our faith binds us to Christ and to one another, The Episcopal Church does not recognize a religious exemption from vaccinations for our members. In fact, we affirm the importance of vaccinations for the health of individuals and communities, and we urge people to be vaccinated and to encourage others to do the same.

The Church has long supported fact, evidence, and scientifically based policies. The proper and responsible use of vaccines is a duty not only to our own selves and families but to our communities. Choosing to not vaccinate, when it is medically safe, threatens the lives of others.

The Episcopal Church recognizes no claim of theological or religious exemption from vaccination for our members and reiterates the spirit of General Convention policies that Episcopalians should seek the counsel of experienced medical professionals, scientific research, and epidemiological evidence.

We have urged all religious leaders to support evidence-based measures that ensure the strongest protections for our communities. Furthermore, our congregations and dioceses were asked to partner with medical professionals to counter false information, and to become educated about programs in their communities that can provide vaccinations and immunizations at reduced or no cost to those in need.

The Diocese of Maine stands firmly with this resolution and does not make provision for a religious exemption from the COVID-10 vaccine, nor from any other medically safe vaccine. We have urged our members to be vaccinated and to tell the story of their vaccination experience to others as encouragement for others to get vaccinated.

LD 51, 1098, and 1209 failed in the legislature.

LD 1522 – An Act to Provide Economic Justice to Historically Disadvantaged Older Citizens by Amending the Laws Governing the Medicare Savings Program and the Elderly Low-cost Drug Program (Support)

As is the case nationwide, a majority of the members of Maine churches are over the age of 60, and many of them live on fixed income near or below the poverty line. So, LD 1522 would benefit “our” folks.

But here’s something else that’s true about the members of churches that are part of the Maine Council of Churches, no matter their age: our guiding principles include loving our neighbors as ourselves; seeking to fulfill the requirements of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly; and standing in solidarity with the marginalized, the vulnerable, the outcast, and the oppressed. We don’t always live up to these principles, but they are our moral compass. And so, we support LD 1522, not just because it would help “our own,” but because it would help Mainers who have experienced a lifetime of exclusion from education, employment, advancement, and equal pay—older Mainers who are part of the BIPOC and LGBTQ communities, who are living with a disability, and who are women. Because they have faced decades of bias, these neighbors (within and beyond the church) are more often economically disadvantaged in later life than those who have had advantages.

LD 1522 proposes to significantly increase eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program – a program that puts real money into the pockets of low-income older people, including and especially those who have lived on the margins for many years. LD 1522 would help create a more just, equitable, and compassionate community here in Maine.

The Governor included this bill in the budget which was signed into law on July 12th, 2023.

LD 1619 – An Act to Improve Maine’s Reproductive Privacy Laws

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, 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.

This bill passed and was signed into law on July 19th, 2023.

RACIAL JUSTICE

LD 199 – An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program (Support)

The Episcopal Church recognizes the fundamental human rights of all people as expressed in our Baptismal Covenant and we reaffirm that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to all refugees and both regular and irregular migrants.

We believe that all Maine people, no matter where they come from, should have access to affordable healthcare and should be able to see a doctor when needed. Exclusions based on immigration status are unfair and short-sighted, and they harm our community health. We remember that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were refugees, as they were forced to flee into a foreign land to escape violence.

Without health coverage, many low-income immigrants must wait until a condition becomes an emergency to get care, further endangering their health and putting added stress on our overburdened emergency departments. Children's access to health care improves when their parents have health coverage. Children's physical, mental, and emotional health are impacted by the wellbeing of their caretakers – whole families need care to thrive.

The Episcopal Church stresses the importance of demonstrating hospitality and welcome as Christian values at the local level. LD 199 continues Maine's work of improving access to health care that started with Medicaid expansion, making our healthcare system more equitable and our workforce more resilient. Immigrants are essential parts of Maine's communities and our future. It's time we honor their human right to health care and pass this bill.

LD 199 failed in the legislature.

LD 178 – An Act to Support Reentry and Reintegration into the Community (Support)

Successful re-entry into society is one of the most challenging parts of rehabilitation and an area where The Episcopal Church has voiced particular concern. When re-entering their communities, former offenders find themselves needing to reconnect with family and friends, find employment and housing while having a criminal record, and adjust to life outside of prison. Not everyone is able to make the readjustment successfully, and numerous entities, including government, NGOs, and religious organizations, are investing in strategies to provide services to help offenders and to prevent recidivism.

*A number of faith-based groups are involved in supporting prisoner re-entry by offering programs and resources to those who are still incarcerated. Within The Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Florida has scaled their work in response to the growth of prisons and helped create the ecumenical *Kairos Prison Ministry* program which has spread across the Church. In addition to fulfilling our obligation to care for and minister to people in all places, prison ministries help engage and support people in their rehabilitation and ease the challenges of re-entry.*

The Episcopal Church has long advocated for both church and government support for prisoner re-entry programs. In 1994, parishes were encouraged to establish relationships with offenders and to support them after their release from prison until they could become self-sufficient in society. This mission was expanded in a 2012 resolution, which stated that The Episcopal Church is firmly committed to a system that provides prisoners with assistance before and after their time in prison, including programs that provide job training and education.

Expanding effective re-entry programs across the country would have a dramatic effect on the people working to build new lives and their communities. Providing support and employment to these individuals greatly assists their transition into their community and affirms our faith that no person is beyond redemption and renewal.

LD 178 failed in the legislature.

LD 618 – An Act to Eliminate Critical Race Theory, Social and Emotional Learning, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from School Curricula (Oppose)

The reality and naming of structural racism was no mystery to Jesus or to the biblical people of God. If anything, God seems particularly concerned about divisions and hierarchies that leave one group protected and privileged while another group is outcast and vulnerable.

In Revelation 7:9, we see the image of people from all nations and races gathered around the throne and worshipping God. That vision doesn't merge us all into one race or nation. It says we'll be united in love, not uniform in identity. That's the dream of God. That's how Christians embrace the grace of race.

The airwaves are full of people who grind against CRT because they say it makes children feel bad. First, if all you feel in the presence of these difficult truths is bad, then it probably isn't being done responsibly. Those who teach history correctly are helping to shape citizens who will be thoughtful, fair members of their communities.

A Christian approach to dismantling racism holds out grace and hope, and at the same time treats us like morally accountable human beings who will not break when faced with painful, once-hidden realities. The truth will not destroy you. The only thing the truth destroys is narratives and structures built on lies, none of which should have stood in first place.

Well, the good news is that we are already forgiven, but this does mean we are not responsible. It means we must not waste our time with feelings of guilt, but instead look with clear eyes on historic and present-day injustices—which is to say we need to repent—and then go about the work of repairing the damage. That’s what Critical Race Theory is about: refusing to deny the sins of the past or the responsibilities of the present. CRT teaches us that racism is a shared problem that each of us must tackle, but none of us can overcome alone.

Our deep concern is that the dangerous narrative surrounding this bill will prevent a full account of our history from being told and understood.

The Episcopal Church has made educating and addressing systemic racism – both within and beyond the church – a priority through its Sacred Ground discussion series.

Efforts to suppress honest, thorough, authentically representative instruction run counter to the core tenets of our faith. Our faith formation is based on the principle that faith has need of the whole truth, the full story.

By the grace and love of God, we believe we can rebuild and transform systems and lives together here in Maine and nationally. This bill does nothing to achieve those goals. Please oppose LD 618.

LD 618 failed in the legislature.

TRIBAL JUSTICE

LD 78 – Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Require All Provisions in the Constitution to Be Included in the Official Printing (Support)

LD 578 – Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Concerning the Publication of Maine Indian Treaty Organizations (Support)

LD 78 and LD 578 both propose an amendment to Article X of the Constitution of Maine which would remove the restriction on publishing Article X, Section 5 dealing with the transfer of treaty obligations to the Wabanaki nations located in Maine from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to the State of Maine when Maine gained statehood in 1820. These treaty obligations were rendered invisible (not to be printed) when the Constitution was amended in 1876. However, Section 5 remains in force, and is one of the foundations of subsequent relationships between the State of Maine and the Wabanaki nations located in Maine to the present day.

Removing the Constitutional restriction on printing Article X, Section 5 would make Maine’s treaty obligations visible once again to readers of the Constitution. We’re happy that this proposed resolution has bipartisan support, as signified by these two bills with identical language. This is a small but significant step in once again reminding legislators and other citizens of Maine of the central place of relationships between the State of Maine and the Wabanaki nations located within the State of Maine. Failure to print Article X, Section 5 amounts to “out of sight out of mind”, in reality.

For over thirty years, the Committee on Indian Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine has been working to improve relations with our Wabanaki neighbors. Given the last 400 years of history, including over 200 years of statehood, in which these relationships have been invisible to many non-Indigenous people, the work of strengthening relationships has been a significant challenge, and remains a work in progress.

LD 78 passed (578 was deemed redundant) and is on the ballot next month as Question 6.

LD 294 – An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority (Support)

LD 294 would add a citizen of the Wabanaki nations located in Maine to membership of the Baxter State Park Authority. The Authority currently consists of three members, the Attorney General, the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Director of the Maine Forest Service. The addition of a citizen of the Wabanaki nations would recognize that Katahdin stands in the traditional territory of the Wabanaki nations and that Katahdin is the most sacred place in that territory to the Wabanaki peoples. Yet the Wabanaki peoples have been excluded from decisions about care for the mountain and the surrounding lands for generations.

The members of the Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations agree that it's time – in fact, it's long overdue -- for the Wabanaki peoples to have a voice in decision-making about their most sacred site, and we believe that adding a Wabanaki citizen as a member of the Baxter State Park Authority would be an important step toward the original people of this land having a voice at the table. Passage of this bill would be a good step toward accepting Barry Dana's offer.

LD 294 has been carried over to the next session.

LD 1970 – An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act (Support)

The members of the Episcopal Committee on Indian Relations understand that Indigenous children are best raised within their extended families, communities, and cultures, and that tribal sovereignty includes the right of Indigenous nations to make decisions about what is best for children who are tribal citizens. We agree with the 18 national child advocacy organization that have labeled ICWA as the “gold standard” in child welfare policy and practice.

Christians, including Episcopalians, have participated in the past in the practice of removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities. The 2022 General Convention of The Episcopal Church adopted a resolution to investigate The Episcopal Church's participation in the history of Indian boarding schools. Sadly, however, some people who identify as Christians are among those pursuing the current challenge to the constitutionality of ICWA at the federal level. We stand in opposition to the assumptions underlying their challenge to ICWA.

We reject the assumptions of race and class and religious superiority that claim that Indigenous children are better off raised by white middle class Christian families who offer material advantages for the children involved while advancing Christianity. We call this rationale what it is: an attack on Indigenous children, families, nations, and cultures. Wabanaki and Maine state child welfare workers, attorneys, and judges, among others, have invested a great deal of time and effort since 1999 in seeking to bring Maine into compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act.

Much has already been accomplished in Maine, and the work continues. While the Supreme Court of the United States deliberates on the constitutionality of ICWA at the federal level, we ask that the State of Maine join with 12 other states that have already written the protections of ICWA into state law.

LD 1970 was signed by the Governor on June 30th, 2023.

LD 2004 – An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations (Support)

At the time of the passage of this Diocesan resolution, there was legislation pending in Congress, H.R. 6707 An Act to Advance Equality for Wabanaki Nations, which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives. In the rush to final adjournment of Congress last December, H.R. 6707 did not pass in the U.S. Senate. One of the arguments used against passage of H.R. 6707 was that it did not have the support of the State of Maine. Passage of LD 2004 would demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that amending the Settlement Acts of 1980 does, indeed, have the support of the State of Maine!

LD 2004 seeks to achieve the same primary goal as H.R. 6707, to remove state barriers to the application of federal laws benefiting Indigenous nations to the Wabanaki nations of Maine. As of 2019, a report by Suffolk University identified 151 federal laws to benefit Indigenous nations that the Wabanaki Nations did not have access to. As demonstrated by a report by Harvard University in 2022, the inability to access these laws stunted the economic development of the Wabanaki nations, and also of the surrounding rural areas of Maine. Diocesan Resolution #1 also includes support for the Mi'kmaq nation in their efforts to amend their separate Settlement Act. LD 2004 also includes provisions to address the terms of this subsequent Settlement Act.

LD 2004 failed in the legislature.

Maine Council of Churches Official Partners

Bread for the World - Environmental Priorities Coalition Maine - Gun Safety Coalition
Maine Equal Justice - Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition - Maine Prisoners Advocacy Coalition
National Religious Campaign Against Torture - Maine Council on Aging
Maine Military Family Commission - Preble Street Faith Advocacy Network
Restorative Justice Institute of Maine

Advocacy Allies

Equality Maine – Homeless Voices for Justice - Maine Affordable Housing Coalition
Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition – Maine TransNet
Moral Movement Maine - Vision for Equitable Maine