



Rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the mission of the Maine Council of Churches is to inspire congregations and people of faith to unite in good works that build a culture of justice, compassion and peace.

"SEEKING COMMON GROUND, WORKING FOR THE COMMON GOOD"

Testimony in Opposition to L.R. 2678, An Act to Make Supplemental appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of the State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2012 and June 30, 2013

Senator Rosen, Representative Flood and members of the Joint Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator McCormick, Representative Strang-Burgess and members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Rev. Jill Saxby and it's my honor to serve as the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. There are many clergy and lay leaders of several faiths here at the State House today. We are here today not as policy experts but to voice our moral opposition to the proposals before you. People of faith will be holding a prayer vigil here at the State House for the next 3 days, as you conduct these hearings. We will be, as the Quakers put it so beautifully, "holding all of you in the Light" and praying for budget decisions that represent Maine's compassionate values of caring for our neighbors.

For our testimony today, we have brought a Statement of Conscience opposing the proposals before you. The full statement is with the written materials we've submitted. For now, I'd just like to read a brief excerpt:

"Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke the word of the LORD, saying, *"is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice. . . Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"* "As people of faith, we believe . . . we are called . . . to love our neighbors as ourselves . . . [and to] treat all our neighbors as [we would] members of our own family -- "our own kin."

"As people of faith, we pray that our elected leaders will remember that budgets are moral documents, representing moral choices. . . . We strongly urge our elected leaders to reject proposals to cut programs that benefit low-income Mainers, including many working individuals and families, such as Mainecare and other critical safety net programs. . . . We believe that a fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the most vulnerable are faring. We cannot allow thousands of Mainers to lose health care coverage at a time when many are also struggling to put food on the table, find housing or just keep warm through the winter.

"As people of faith, we look with confidence for the day Isaiah described: *"if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, your light shall rise in the darkness . . . you shall be like a watered garden, a spring ...whose waters never fail."*

We need not fail. We commit ourselves to actions that satisfy the basic human needs of the most vulnerable Mainers, and urge you, our elected officials, to use your own powers of leadership and legislation to do likewise.”

As of Tuesday morning, 521 Maine clergy and laypeople have signed the full statement, and signatures continue to come in. It’s signed by people from East Millinocket to Kittery Point, from Auburn to York. It’s signed by Reformed and Conservative rabbis, Catholic priests, sisters and laypeople, Protestants of eleven different denominations, several Buddhists, and one person who signed himself, “no religion but full of faith.”

For the next three days, we will be praying together here at the State House and all over the state, full of faith that here in Maine, we will not hide from our own kin and we need not, and we will not, fail one another.

Thank you for your service, and for considering our views.