



*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 on Proposed Cuts in the Biennial Budget to Public Benefits Programs  
March 7, 2011

Senator Rosen, Representative Flood, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator McCormick, Representative Strang Burgess and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Rev. Jill Saxby and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council is a 72 year old association of Maine's Roman Catholic and eight Protestant denominations that has a long history of speaking out on issues of economic justice.

That is why we are here today. Not as economists or experts on the budget. But as people of faith, who believe that budgets are moral documents, reflecting our ethical choices. Our state budget is a statement of what we think the relationship should be between the rich and the poor, the strong and the vulnerable, the powerful and the powerless.

Making such choices in the biennial budget is like running in a relay race. We've been handed a baton by those who've gone before us. That baton is the profound ethical insight that each human being is of infinite value and that what happens to one of us matters to the welfare of all of us. If you don't have shoes, I can't walk comfortably. If I don't have health care, your well-being is at stake, too. We are all so much more than isolated economic units.

The baton in this relay race is our own faith in ourselves, that we are still capable of creating a moral society, a just economy and a government that understands that the ultimate test of our civilization is how the most vulnerable among are faring.

Attached to my testimony today is a statement of 10 principles called "An Ethic for Economic Life." It was adopted unanimously by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and endorsed by the Maine Council of Churches. We commend these ethical principles to you today.

Before you make up your minds about these proposed cuts, we respectfully ask you to take a moment and consider: would you be willing to trade places with a person who will be most profoundly affected by your vote?

We believe that any short-term savings in these proposals will lead to long-term economic, social and moral costs that we will all have to bear. We can prevent those costs, those losses of human dignity and potential. We believe it is wrong to ask more from the poor while asking less from the rich.

Please don't drop the baton that has been handed off to us. Don't let Maine drop out of the generations-long advance toward a more just and more compassionate society. The choices we make today will be our own moral legacy to the future.

Thank you for your public service and thank you for considering our views.

Rev. Jill Job Saxby  
Maine Council of Churches  
19 Pleasant Ave.  
Portland, ME 04103  
207-772-1918  
[jsaxby@mainecouncilofchurches.org](mailto:jsaxby@mainecouncilofchurches.org)