

**A Statement by
Penelope Morrell, Legislative Liaison
Concerned Women for America of Maine
Before the Joint Judiciary Committee
LD 779, "An Act To Remove Clergy as Signatories on Marriage Licenses."
March 13, 2007**

Chairman Hobbins and Chairwoman Simpson and members of the Joint Judiciary Committee, my name is Penny Morrell, Legislative Liaison for Concerned Women for America of Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss LD 779 and its influence on marriage and family.

Marriage is the foundation of our society. Disrupt the foundation and the whole society is in peril. As with all foundations, the base must be properly compacted, the formwork set up right, and the concrete free of voids.

- The base of marriage is the community—including laws, government institutions, society, and extended family.
- The formwork is the church that shows the way and holds the couple accountable.
- The concrete is the individuals who enter into the marriage. Their covenant of love must be free of voids.

Neglect even one of these, and the most carefully poured foundation can fail.

LD 779 removes the formwork—the church, further endangering marriage and threatening our very society. Marriage is the first of all society institutions. It was created by God himself. He laid the framework in the Bible: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Eph. 2:25 Pastors and priests are needed to hold couples accountable to their covenant not only with each but with God himself.

LD 779 is another of a long list of external threats to marriage. Adultery, pre-marital sex, no-fault divorce, co-habitation, and absentee fathers and mothers have already weakened marriage. Marriage is steadily becoming little more than a lease on another human being until a newer model comes out.

The social indicator warning signs have largely been ignored — as if champions of the family and traditional values were akin to Chicken Little. But today's young people freely admit that their sky IS falling. They have been the painful pawns of ugly divorce suits. Social workers and therapists have taken the place of a committed mother and father.

The security, fulfillment and love the young people seek can be found only in families. But too many of the children who have grown up in the last two decades have not

experienced this kind of family. Walk into your community school, and you will easily see the results of weakened families.

Weakening social norms is not only devastating to children, our social policies directly affect our fiscal realities. The failure to raise children in healthy families costs society a very high price in our Health and Human Services budget. The Federal government spends more than \$31 million annually on paternity tests. The government spends over \$4 BILLION annually enforcing child support.

The 1987 *Survey of Youth in Custody*, published by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, found that 70 percent of youth in state reform institutions across the U.S. had grown up in single- or no-parent situations.

Hoover Institution reported, “A free society needs people with consciences...If people don’t conform themselves to the law, someone will either have to compel them to do so or protect the public when they do not...Without two parents, working together as a team, the child has more difficulty learning the combination of empathy, reciprocity, fairness, and self-command that people ordinarily take for granted. If the child does not learn this at home, society will have to manage his behavior in some other way. He may have to be rehabilitated, incarcerated, or otherwise restrained. In this case, prisons will substitute for parents.” (Jennifer Roback Morse, “Parents or Prisons” *Policy Review* Aug./Sept. 2003)

We hear so much rhetoric about the importance of taking care of the nation's children; yet legislation like LD 779 continues to foster a culture that is harmful to women and disastrous for children.

Concerned Women for America of Maine pleads: Vote “NO” on “An Act to Remove Clergy as Signatories on Marriage Licenses.”