



## DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

January 24, 2024

Senator Regina Birdsell, Chair  
And Members of the Senate HHS Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

**Re: SB 496 (Climate and Health Protection Program Within NH DHHS)**

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

As Director of the Office of Public Policy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester, and on behalf of Bishop Peter Libasci, I write to register our **support for SB 496**.

The Catholic Church considers that, while the Church and the political community are autonomous from one another, “both, under different titles, are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same people”, and therefore the more that both can work cooperatively together, the more they will be able to advance the good of all. Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 76. It is in that vein that we respectfully offer these comments on SB 496.

In 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical letter titled *Laudato si*, which he subtitled “Care for our Common Home.” In that letter, Pope Francis called the climate “a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” *Id.*, 23. He named climate change “a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods.” *Id.*, 25. “It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” *Id.*

The letter pays special attention to the impacts of climate change on the poor, who are least able to deal with the consequences of it. And Pope Francis also focuses on the ways that care for the environment is inextricably linked to how we treat our fellow human beings. “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes

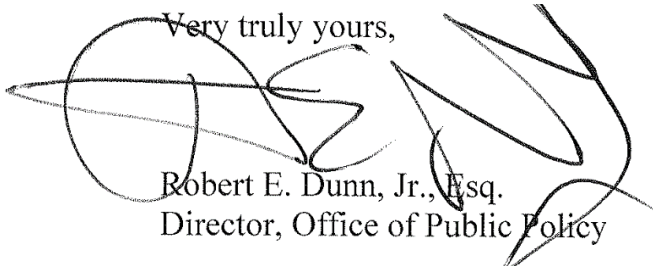
difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble.” *Id.*, 117.

Obviously, SB 496 touches on these global challenges in only a small way. But given the realities of those challenges, SB 496 appears to take a prudent step toward addressing how climate change might directly impact the health of people here in New Hampshire. Establishing this program within the Department of Health and Human Services gives emphasis to the point that we should not look at climate change as simply a theoretical scientific issue, but rather as one that might be seen to be of importance to the health of real individuals on the ground here in New Hampshire.

While this position might be housed in various places within the executive branch, it seems sensible that it be placed within the state agency that the legislature has tasked with advancing the public health of the people of New Hampshire and with providing “an integrated, administrative structure for the design and delivery of a comprehensive and coordinated system of health and human services.” RSA 126-A:1.

Therefore, we think that SB 496 advances the common good, and so we respectfully ask that you recommend ought to pass.

Thank you as always for your kind consideration of our views.

Very truly yours,  
  
Robert E. Dunn, Jr., Esq.  
Director, Office of Public Policy