

Thursday, August 17, 2023

To the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester,

We, the undersigned organizations, institutional leaders, elected officials, and concerned residents strongly denounce the recent anti-LGBTQ+ policies enacted by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester. This policy, which mandates the updating of student handbooks to ban same-sex relationships and expression/behaviors inconsistent with birth-assigned sex, is a regressive step that has far-reaching consequences for the wellbeing and inclusivity of over 9,000 students across 21 elementary and secondary schools in Worcester County. This policy not only contradicts the core principles of inclusivity and acceptance, but also perpetuates harm to LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly youth, who deserve a safe and supportive educational environment.

The policy's coverage of gender identity and sexual orientation, including the potential for expulsion for actions deemed "confusing" or "scandalous," perpetuates a culture of intolerance and discrimination. This is compounded by Bishop McManus' history of opposing pro-LGBTQ+ and anti-racist initiatives in schools, such as the revocation of the Nativity School's Catholic status in 2022.

As advocates for inclusivity, equality, and the welfare of all our youth, we firmly reject these harmful policies. **We echo the sentiments of national and state-wide LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations and individuals, stressing the necessity of acceptance, support, and affirmation for LGBTQ+ students.** Policies that marginalize, deny identities, and perpetuate harmful stereotypes run counter to the values of justice, compassion, and respect that should guide educational institutions.

We firmly believe that faith and acceptance can coexist. It is possible to hold religious beliefs while recognizing the humanity and rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. The Catholic Church has a moral obligation to ensure that its educational institutions provide nurturing environments where all students can thrive, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.

We urge the Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester to reconsider and revoke these policies, embracing a stance that values and uplifts all young people in our community. We call for a comprehensive review of the existing policies informed by a dialogue with LGBTQ+ advocates, community members, and experts to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment within its educational institutions. Our shared goal should be to create environments that

nurture personal growth, respect individual identity, and empower our youth to flourish and learn.

We collectively demand accountability from this institution that wields significant influence over the lives and education of our youth, and advocate for an inclusive and compassionate approach that honors the dignity and humanity of each individual.

Sincerely,

Deborah Hall,
Chief Executive Officer,
YWCA Central
Massachusetts

Tanya Neslusen,
Executive Director,
MassEquality

Joshua Croke,
President, Love Your
Labels

Senator Robyn Kennedy,
The Commonwealth of
Massachusetts

**State Senator Jo
Comerford,**
MA State Senate

**Senator Jamie B.
Eldridge,**
MA State Senate

**Senator Michael O.
Moore,**
MA State Senate

Councilor George Russell,
City Councilor, Worcester
City Council

Councilor Sean Rose,
District 1 City Councilor,
Worcester City Council

Councilor Thu Nguyen,
City Councilor At-Large,
City of Worcester

Guillermo Creamer,
Candidate for Mayor,
Guillermo for Mayor

Laurie Ross,
Research Partner,
Collaborative for Youth
and Community Justice

Helen Segil,
Executive Director, ONE
Worcester

Meg Gallo,
Program Director, Refugee
& Immigrant Assistance
Center

Kim L Dawkins,
President & CEO,
Pathways for Change, Inc.

Tracy Kraus,
Executive Director,
Worcester Chamber Music
Society

Audra Doody,
Co-CEO, Living in
Freedom Together

Doug Arbetter,
Treasurer, Worcester
Working Families IEPAC

Amy Ebbeson,
Director, Worcester
Addresses Childhood
Trauma

Juliet Feibel,
Executive Director,
ArtsWorcester

Dr. Kathleen Jordan,
President/CEO, Seven
Hills Foundation

Jennifer Gaskin,
Worcester Caribbean
American Carnival
Association; Cohost, Touch
My Podcast; Sole
Proprietor, Jennifer The
Author

Casey Burns,
Director, Coalition for a
Healthy Greater
Worcester

Hayley Haywood,
CEO, Elevating Access

Lamar Brown-Noguera,
Program Coordinator,
SWAGLY

Michelle Smith,
CEO, AIDS Project
Worcester

Myran Parker-Brass,
Interim CEO, Girls Inc.,
Worcester

**Valerie
Zolezzi-Wyndham,**
Promoting Good

Matthias Waschek,
Jean and Myles
McDonough Director,
Worcester Art Museum

Alicia Albernaz,
Owner, SeetLi Baked

Rev. Katherine Blaisdell,
Minister in Charge, First
Baptist Worcester

Karen E. Ludington,
Executive Director,
Worcester Area Mission
Society

Emmaline Raven,
President, The Alliance