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**LD 912 – An Act to Clarify the Scope of Practice of Certain Licensed Professionals Regarding Conversion Therapy**.

Senator Volk, Representative Fecteau and members of the Committee on Labor, Research and Economic Development

My name is Carie Johnson. I am the minister at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta. I have served on the board of the Religious Coalition Against Discrimination. We are here today to speak on behalf of Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network.

Unitarian Universalism is a welcoming faith tradition, with a call to continually put our beliefs into action. We promote social justice, equity and compassion through words and actions. It is with that as a foundation that I am here today to **ask for your support of LD 912** – An Act to Clarify the Scope of Practice of Certain Licensed Professionals Regarding Conversion Therapy. These dangerous and discredited practices that attempt to change a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity must be prohibited by Maine’s state-licensed mental health providers.

So-called “conversion therapy” is ineffective. Sadly, some religious groups who consider being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender a sin have promoted this idea of “reparative therapy.” Through these harmful practices, LGBT people may be wrongly led to believe they are unacceptable to God, their families, and their community. Our theology teaches otherwise.

Unitarian Universalism’s First Principle is the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the Second is justice, equity and compassion in human relations. We teach that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are created in the image of God, as are all people, and therefore do not need to be repaired or changed in sexual orientation or gender identity. Our Principles call me as a Unitarian Universalist minister to condemn the dehumanizing practices of so-called conversion therapy and to urge you to ban these practices in Maine.

As a faith leader I often find myself counseling people, young and old, straight and gay who are trying to find their way in the world. Nothing in this proposed legislation would stop that. I tell people to explore their own sense of self and ask what is true for them and talk about the things that confuse them or spark their wonderful sense of curiosity. I build relationships with people who have different sexual orientations and gender identities by being respectful and helping them to experience all the joys of this world. As a spiritual leader I invite all people to cross-divides of difference and take risks by authentically choosing to get to know one another.

Just this month a panel of eight gender diverse youth with various sexual orientations presented their stories of coming out to a community of supportive and affirming members, friends, and family. In bearing witness to their experiences we celebrated their dignity, worth, and value. These courageous young adults are leaders in strengthening and advancing messages of love and acceptance, affirmation and celebration of all God’s children. They open the doors for their peers and adults to live authentically and to find their way out of depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behavior including suicide.

I urge you to join these young leaders in the work to protect the inherent worth and dignity of every Maine child and youth; to promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and to prevent dangerous harm by prohibiting licensed professionals from engaging in so-called “conversion therapy” in Maine. Thank you.