



**THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VERMONT**  
*Together in Christ...growing locally, serving globally*

**The Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Ely**  
**Bishop of Vermont**

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February 13, 2019

To: Vermont State Senate Committee on Government Operations  
From: Bishop and Diocesan Council of the Episcopal Church in Vermont  
Re: PR2 - Declaration of rights; eliminating reference to slavery

I write on behalf of the Bishop and Diocesan Council of the Episcopal Church in Vermont to express our unanimous support for PR2, recorded at our meeting on February 9, 2019.

The Episcopal Church's commitment to racial reconciliation and healing compels us to express support for the long overdue full prohibition of slavery in the Vermont State Constitution. While many in Vermont continue to claim that Vermont was the first state to eliminate slavery from its Constitution, the truth is that it was only a partial prohibition. Elimination of the following language from our Constitution will complete the effort begun 242 years ago:

*"therefore no person born in this country, or brought from over sea, ought to be holden by law, to serve any person as a servant, slave or apprentice, after arriving to the age of twenty-one years, unless bound by the person's own consent, after arriving to such age, or bound by law for the payment of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like."*

Words matter, and these words matter, because as long as they remain in our Constitution, they express our support of slavery for persons under the age of 21 and for any *"bound by law for the payment of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like."* This clause allows us to treat incarcerated persons and many others in the criminal justice system as slaves. It is time to declare our unequivocal opposition to slavery in any form by amending our Constitution accordingly.

Very truly yours,

The Right Reverend Thomas C. Ely, Bishop

Diocesan Council Members: Mary Alice Daley, St. Andrew's, Colchester; The Rev. Heidi Edson, St. Luke's, Chester; Collen Gates, St. Peter's Bennington; The Rev. Louis Paul Gratz, Bennington; The Rev. Paul Habersang, Christ Church, Montpelier; The Rev. Kathleen Hartman, Christ Church, Bethel; Edith (Dinny) Hawksworth, St. Matthew's, Enosburg Falls; Barbara Johnson, St. James, Woodstock; The Rev. Dr. Frederick Moser, Trinity Church, Shelburne; The Rev. Liam Muller, Trinity Church, Rutland; Lisa Newton, Trinity Church, Shelburne; The Rev. Mark Preece, St. Martin's, Fairlee; The Rev. J. Robert Spainhour, Holy Trinity, Swanton; Marjorie Strong, Good Shepherd, Barre; Jean Wilson, St. Mark's, Newport; Canon Lynn Bates, ex-officio; Maurice Harris, Communications Minister for the Episcopal Church in Vermont.

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