



Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
LD 227 - An Act Regarding Health Care in the State

March 5, 2024

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, my name is Gia Drew, and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. Today our community consists of over 100,000 Mainers who play, work, laugh, love, grieve, and live out their days, in every city and town in Maine. This testimony today is on behalf of EqualityMaine.

We urge you to support **LD 227 - An Act Regarding Health Care in the State**. Maine has been and continues to be a leader nationwide in both LGBTQ+ rights and reproductive freedom. The rights of LGBTQ+ people are inextricably linked to our bodies, and having personal autonomy, including reproductive options, are at the center of our fight for equality.

Embodying our state motto "Dirigo", Maine has been a leader in advancing LGBTQ+ rights nationally, electing some of the first out LGBTQ+ candidates to serve in public office – like the honorable Barb Wood, who was elected to Portland City council in 1988, and Dale McCormick, who was elected state senator in 1990. We were one of the first states to enact strong non-discrimination laws in 2005 and the first state in the country to pass marriage equality by popular vote in 2012. Additionally, the Maine Supreme Court ruled in 2016, in the landmark Nicole Maines case, that transgender people cannot be discriminated against in Maine. Time and time again, Mainers have repeatedly said that LGBTQ+ people are an important part of the fabric of Maine, which helps make our state such a special place to live. We continually partner with a wide range of communities and across generations to make Maine a more inclusive and welcoming place to live, work, and visit.

Here in Maine people who need gender affirming healthcare can get it. And in accordance with Maine law, health insurers in Maine may not prohibit or exclude gender-affirming care as part of covered services. Additionally, MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program, must also cover gender affirming care, and has been doing so for

half a decade. You'll hear and read testimony today from transgender people like me, parents of transgender youth, and providers who offer this type of healthcare that this



care is life-affirming and life-saving. All kids deserve access to the healthcare they need and that should not depend on the state that they live in.

Unfortunately, bans on best-practice medical care are on the rise nationally. These bills target transgender youth by blocking their access to medical care, care that is backed by years of rigorous research and endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, and other leading health authorities. The last two years we've seen a horrifying, record number of political attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, and especially on transgender people - with more than 700 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced across the nation in 2023 alone. Tragically, twenty-two states have passed laws or policies that have attempted to block gender-affirming health care for transgender youth, with fifteen of those states enacting those laws last year.¹ And to date, twenty-one states across the country have banned access to abortion.

While the courts have issued a few rulings stopping some of these bans from taking effect, the outcome of these and their timelines are uncertain, leaving transgender youth and people seeking abortions in limbo and potential danger. Equally as ominous, in three states, administering gender-affirming healthcare to a minor is a felony crime, punishable by up to a decade in prison. That has meant that families have had to look to other states for care options, refuge, and safety. These bills not only display a fundamental lack of understanding of transgender children, but they also ban access to medical care often by criminalizing either the doctors or even the parents of transgender youth seeking to provide best-practice medicine for children in their care.

Maine's medical providers deserve the right to provide best-practice medical care without fear of recrimination or threat of legal consequences.

Offering hope and the opportunity to access gender affirming care and/or reproductive services to people and families is something Maine can do to help during these dire times. I hope that Maine will continue to lead by sending the message: Maine welcomes you here.

We urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 227.

Thank you.

Gia Drew
(she/her)
Executive Director, EqualityMaine

¹ <https://lgbtmap.medium.com/lgbtq-equality-maps-updates-may-2023-4ee004babb4c>