

Cal Megan
Portland
LD 537

Greetings Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary,
Regarding the March 3rd meeting about ME LD537
February 27, 2025

My name is Cal Megan and I am a concerned Maine citizen, supervisor at a 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline, and graduate social work student. I am testifying in support of House Bill 537 to protect youth from the dangers and hardships that can come from getting doxxed. Not only can doxxing harm one's physical safety, it also can demolish one's emotional and mental well being.

Working for a crisis and suicide hotline, I have had first-hand experience with working with children who are grappling with suicidal ideation due to online bullying. From having private messages leaked to experiencing ridicule by classmates on their social media pages, numerous kids in the 21st century suffer from the pervasiveness of cyberbullying. While schools have policies and procedures in place to address doxxing that occurs between students within their individual schools, youth whose bullies do not attend the same educational institution as the victim(s) are often told that there is nothing the faculty can do. This is bullying that children face at the hands of their peers—now I ask one to consider the ramifications that could occur when an adult politician is the cyberbully. At the 2023 Massachusetts Annual Suicide Prevention Conference, key note speaker Doctor Thomas Joiner spoke of the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide where serious risk significantly increases when desire is present (i.e., perceived burdensomeness; hopeless about never belonging, not being a burden, or alone; and thwarted belongingness) combined with capability (i.e., fearless about suicide, high pain tolerance). According to The Department of Health and Human Services' 2022 report, 921 youth visit the emergency room due to injuries resulting from deliberate self-harm. To have children reach out in severe distress with the belief that the only way out of the pain that comes from public rejection and humiliation is death is gravely concerning and an indicator that more must be done to mitigate heightened risk for suicide that doxxing can cause. When assessing for safety risk on the suicide hotline, not only do we account for warning factors, we also pay attention to what protective factors (buffers) are in place. Youth need more buffers to protect them from being doxxed, and also to have more impactful measures in place to protect children who have been doxxed.

ME LD537 would permit legal ramifications for perpetrators of doxxing against youth. By having a policy in place that allows civil actions to be taken against adult cyberbullies, not only would the State be discouraging the act of adults doxxing youth, they we would also be sending the message to children who are victims of doxxing that the devastating harms inflicted upon them are unacceptable and a crime. By having a system in place that protects youth who have been doxxed, the State of Maine would be letting children know that they do belong, that their well-being matters, and that they are in no way burdensome for reaching out to trusted adults in their lives for help. Youth who have been plagued by cyberbullying will be able to see that there are ways to get out of the pits of despair, and their community will walk alongside them through the journey towards justice.

Thank you, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary for reading this testimony. I feel gratitude for your time and consideration of these matters and solutions.

Sincerely,
Cal