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Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Joint standing committee of Judiciary

My name is Alex Wu, and I am a Scarborough High School Senior.

I have not always been proud to be an American, but I have always been proud to be a Mainer. We boast some of the best elections in the nation, an appreciation for the sacredness of nature, and a respect for one another. More than anything, growing up in Maine has taught me how to care for my neighbors. We have, and will always be, a community.

I truly believe our state motto, Dirigo, we lead. We are unique as a state and as peoples.

That having been said, this community is not eternal. I see my friends around me, talking about how they wish to leave Maine. As on a federal level the Trump administration continues to remove rights we had thought were guaranteed in this nation. Many of my friends speak of not just leaving Maine, but also leaving the country to guarantee their rights. A guarantee that the state would protect their rights would convince them that they are safe in staying here, with their friends, and loved ones.

I do not see this as a partisan issue. However, I see the vast list of co-sponsors on this bill, and I see no Republican co-sponsors. So to those whom I suspect will need the most convincing: without the protections of an Equal Rights Amendment, you will lose the people that make up your workforce.

Regardless of what you understand, or you accept, know that an Equal Rights Amendment is not merely about messaging. It will maintain the economy and workforce of Maine.

Maine is the oldest state in the nation. As of the 2020 census, our population is 21.8% over 65.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ME/PST045224>

Specifically we need people entering trades professions. We currently lack the necessary youth to supply the needs for electricity in plumbing. Yet at the same time we do nothing to encourage youth to stay in Maine. These trades are not easily replaceable, and require generational commitment. Opposed to other office jobs, trades are something you learn physically and as of now cannot be easily mechanized. We need tradespeople, and for that we need willing workers.

Youth suicide rates are also particularly high in Maine. In the 2023 Maine Integrated Health survey, these rates were particularly high for marginalized communities affected by this bill. 26% of heterosexual youth reported feeling depressed in the past 12 months, as opposed to 60% of Gay/Lesbian youth and 63% of bisexual youth. This was even higher for transgender youth, of whom 73% felt depressed.

Maine youth also had a disparity in depression based on gender. Male youth reported having being depressed in the past 12 years at 24%, while female youth reported at 46%.

[https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023\\_Reports/Detailed\\_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023\\_Detailed\\_Reports\\_HS\\_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf)

I, at the very least, attribute part of this depressive trend to legislative rights. Many of my friends have joked about 'ending it all'. I hear my friends saying they just want to kill themselves. What's the point of living in a place that will not allow you to express yourself as you are? If our government will not protect us, why bother existing?

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to ask any questions.