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My name is Rev. Benjamin Perry, and I write with deep concern about the anti-trans legislation coming forward in our state. Last year I had to preside at the funeral for one of my congregants—a beautiful, loving trans child who took their own life because they felt this world would never make space for them. I held the family as they wept, and am begging this legislature not to pass laws that will cause more families to experience this unimaginable and wholly preventable grief. Regardless of the laws this body passes, there will be trans and gender nonconforming children in this state. The choice before you is whether they will receive the care and support they need to flourish as citizens of Maine, or receive the message that their government does not want them to exist.

We know from repeated study that laws which guarantee equal protection under the law reduce LGBTQIA+ suicide. Every legitimate scientific body concludes that affirming children's gender disclosure benefits long-term health and happiness. The "threats" trans people pose, however, are entirely fabricated—single incidents that are falsely presented as widespread patterns. Will we let imagined moral panics supersede all-too-real concerns for life, health, and liberty? Will we offer legal power to persecute queer children? It's wrong—a stark evil to follow lies when truth will set us free.

The bill in question asks educators to use the names and pronouns by which children desire to be known. This costs nothing. It harms no one. And yet it means the world to that child, and lets them know their community is invested in their thriving. It's a simple act to honor their humanity, to treat them with respect. It's what all of us want, to be seen and known for who we are. But, the consequences of refusing this basic respect can be enormous.

I'm proud to live in a state with robust human rights protections for all citizens. This fierce independence and interdependence is what I love about Maine. We look out for one another, and refuse to let bullies define our future. I have stood at the graveside, called by God and ordination to weep with those who mourn, but that same power calls me to cry out when powerful voices attack vulnerable children. Please, stand today for what is right: Vote no on these bills and affirm that every person has fundamental rights, dignity, and moral worth.