

Gordon Street
Lincoln
LD 1704

Senator and Chair Anne Carney and Honorable Members of this Judiciary Committee, thank you in advance for your time and attention to my comments regarding LD 1704 - An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex.

My name is Gordon Street, PhD. I am a clinical psychologist who lives and works in the town of Lincoln. I have currently several patients who identify as transgender and have had several in the past as well as a few friends who identify as transgender. I have also read considerable research about mental health issues regarding those who identify as LGBTQ+ including transgender, including research about rates of depression, suicidality, and victimization within LGBTQ+ including specifically transgender populations.

Transgender Mainers face enough stress already. We should not be adding to it. And research suggests that transgender rights restrictions are associated with higher rates of suicide attempts by and higher rates of sexual assaults on youth who identify as transgender.

A 2023 study by the Williams Institute at UCLA found 81% of transgender adults have contemplated suicide and 42% have attempted it. A 2019 Canadian study (Kingsbury et al.) found transgender teenagers 5 times more likely to think about suicide and 7.6 times more likely to attempt it than “straight” (cisgender and heterosexual) teens. And Geoffery Ream’s 2019 analysis of National Violent Death Reporting System data found almost 1 in 4 (24%) of 12 to 14-year-olds who died by suicide were LGBT.

In a 2022 study, almost 26% of transgender teens reported having been sexually assaulted, but the sexual assault rate was higher (36%) among those who reported school staff restricted their access to restrooms and/or locker rooms. The authors (Murchison et al.) note that both rates are significantly higher than the sexual assault rates for cisgender high school girls (15%) and boys (4%).

Last year, the Trevor Project reported that in states where laws restricting transgender rights of minors have been passed, suicide attempts by transgender and gender non-conforming teens increased by as much as 72%. NPR quoted Ronita Nash, who runs research at the Trevor Project, as saying, “we found a very sharp and statistically significant rise in suicide attempt rates after enactment of the laws” in 19 states that had passed a variety of transgender rights restriction laws.

Laws making assaults – including sexual assaults – crimes already exist whether the assaults took place inside bathrooms or locker rooms or outside them, whether they were committed by transgendered assailants or “straight” ones. Laws restricting transgender rights do not make “straight” adults and teens safer, but they do make it more dangerous for transgender youth and adults. Even if you are among those who hope teens who identify as transgender will change their minds, give them a chance. Keep them safe and keep them alive. Do not pass this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.