

Brigitta Valente
Portland, ME
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Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee through written testimony. My name is Brigitta Valente. I am a resident of Portland, Maine and a public Pre-K teacher in Brunswick, Maine. I write to you as a member of both communities.

I am writing today in strong opposition to the following bills being reviewed today: LD 232, LD868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704, LD 1337, LD1432, and LD 380.

As an educator, I will focus my testimony on the bills that are school related.

The bills that are being presented have the capacity to do great harm to all children, especially vulnerable teenagers. Based on the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 35% of Maine high schoolers felt sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks, while 17.8% have seriously considered suicide. Middle schoolers shared similar data, with 32.7% felt sad or hopeless, and 21.8% have seriously considered suicide. In both age ranges, 8% students had attempted suicide at least once. The percentages increase dramatically if you are a teenager who identifies as LGBTQ+.

Whether you're an educator, a parent of a teenager, or a community member, these statistics are staggering. When I first heard them, my heart sank.

Our job as teachers and school staff is to, in addition to teaching children academics, help them to feel safe, seen, heard, and supported. Research also shows that students that feel seen by their teachers have more academic success. We want our students to thrive in all ways.

Bills that require teachers to call students by names make them uncomfortable, force them into going into bathrooms that might make them feel unsafe, and isolate them from their friends and teammates, undercut all the work we are meant to be doing as educators. These bills are invasive and will create situations where all children, especially girls, will be subject to scrutiny and harassment.

Teenagers are just trying to figure out who they are, while also making major life decisions. They are under too much stress as it is. Don't pass bills like these that are meant to fearmonger and address unfounded "concerns," pass bills that address the actual mental health crises that our students are facing.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you!

<https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/MIYHS%20Moments/MIYHS%20Monthly%20moment%20september.pdf>