

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1002

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Karen MacDonald and I am writing to express my strong opposition to this harmful and discriminatory bill (LD 1002) that mandates the deadnaming and misgendering of transgender and nonbinary students in our schools and interferes with an educators ability to provide a sense of belonging in a classroom.

This bill will directly increase harm to students' mental health, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. It disregards the realities many young people face, especially those in unsupportive or unsafe home environments. Forcing educators to reject a student's affirmed identity does not protect anyone—it isolates some of our most vulnerable youth.

Deadnaming—a practice of referring to someone by a name they no longer use—is not neutral. It is harmful and deeply invalidating. Being affirmed in one's name and pronouns isn't just respectful—it saves lives. Research published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* shows that name and pronoun affirmation can reduce depression by 71% and suicide attempts by 65%. These are not abstract numbers. These are real kids in our communities.

This bill also clearly violates the **Maine Human Rights Act**, which prohibits discrimination in education based on gender identity. By mandating misgendering and deadnaming, this legislation not only undermines students' rights—it puts our schools and educators in legal jeopardy.

I know that adolescence is a time of critical identity formation. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, teenagers are navigating who they are in the world. This bill enforces "role confusion" by denying students the ability to authentically express themselves. Would I be required to refer to a child as William, not using a preferred name of Bill? Would I have to refer to a student by a birth name, and not a name change at adoption?

Educators already work hard to partner with families, while also respecting the privacy and dignity of their students. This is not about keeping secrets; it's about keeping students safe and supported.

Let me ask: have you ever used a nickname? Most of us have. Now imagine being *forced* to go by a name that no longer reflects who you are. Imagine having your identity erased every single day in a classroom that's supposed to nurture your growth.

I urge you to vote **no** on this bill. Our students deserve dignity, affirmation, and the freedom to be who they are.

Thank you for your time and for standing on the side of equity and humanity.

Sincerely,
Karen MacDonald
Westbrook Maine

2014 Maine Teacher of the Year

