

May 8, 2025

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Patti Forster, and I am a longtime educator at Camden Hills Regional High School with over three decades of classroom experience. I currently serve as president of the Maine Council for English Language Arts and am the 2021 Knox County Teacher of the Year and the 2020 Maine State English Teacher.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to LD 1337, a bill that would significantly weaken the protections afforded by the Maine Human Rights Act by carving out exemptions that target transgender individuals under the guise of safety and fairness.

This bill proposes two harmful changes. First, it would exempt privately operated women's shelters from being considered places of public accommodation, thus allowing them to legally discriminate against transgender women, many of whom seek shelter while fleeing violence, abuse, or homelessness. Second, it aims to reinterpret Maine's education nondiscrimination protections in a way that limits the rights of transgender female athletes under the pretense of aligning with Title IX.

Let us be clear: these changes do not enhance safety or fairness—they undermine the core intent of the Maine Human Rights Act, which is to protect all individuals from discrimination. The law as it stands ensures that vulnerable people, including transgender Mainers, are treated with dignity and respect when seeking emergency housing or educational opportunities.

Transgender women face disproportionately high rates of violence, homelessness, and poverty. Denying them access to shelters based on fear, rather than fact, puts them at even greater risk. Numerous shelter and domestic violence prevention organizations across the country already serve transgender clients without incident, recognizing that safety comes from compassion, oversight, and trauma-informed care—not exclusion.

Similarly, the attempt to narrow the interpretation of nondiscrimination protections in education ignores the intent of Title IX. Courts have increasingly affirmed that Title IX protects all students, including transgender students, from discrimination. Maine's longstanding commitment to inclusion should not be undermined by efforts to roll back hard-won protections for LGBTQ+ youth.

LD 1337 sends the wrong message about who deserves safety, fairness, and dignity in our communities. It weakens the Maine Human Rights Act, stigmatizes transgender people, and opens the door to broader legal discrimination under the pretense of protecting women. We do not need to choose between protecting women and affirming the rights of transgender people—we can and must do both.

I urge you to reject LD 1337 and uphold the full intent of the Maine Human Rights Act as a tool for justice for all.

Thank you for your time and commitment to justice.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patti Forster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patti Forster