

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 today to testify in opposition to LD 868, which would impose discriminatory and harmful restrictions on transgender and gender-diverse students across our state.

LD 868 does not ensure equity or safety; it does the opposite. By mandating the exclusion of transgender girls and women from female sports teams and requiring schools to enforce rigid, binary policies for bathrooms, locker rooms, and sleeping arrangements, this bill puts already vulnerable students at greater risk of harassment, isolation, and mental health struggles. It sends the damaging message that some students are less worthy of dignity, inclusion, and protection than others.

The evidence is clear: inclusive school environments that affirm a student's gender identity support well-being, academic achievement, and positive peer relationships. In contrast, policies like those proposed in LD 868 are linked to higher rates of bullying, depression, and suicide among transgender youth. These are not abstract statistics—they are the lived experiences of students in our communities, including here in Maine.

Furthermore, this bill opens the door to legal retaliation against schools and educators who are working in good faith to support all students. Allowing individuals to sue schools for alleged violations of these exclusionary mandates creates a climate of fear and mistrust. It undermines the work of school leaders and teachers who are trying to foster welcoming and respectful learning environments for every student.

Maine schools already have policies and procedures in place to ensure safety, privacy, and fairness in athletics and school facilities. These policies allow for case-by-case consideration, respect for student dignity, and the ability to protect all students without resorting to discrimination. LD 868 disregards the nuanced, thoughtful work that many educators and administrators have already undertaken and instead imposes sweeping mandates that strip schools of flexibility and compassion.

We must reject this bill and reaffirm our commitment to the civil rights, mental health, and educational success of every student. Transgender students are part of our school communities. They play on our teams, participate in our classes, and deserve the same respect and opportunities as anyone else.

I urge this committee to oppose LD 868. Let us stand together for welcoming, student-centered education that honors the humanity and dignity of all Maine learners.

Thank you for your time and your dedication to all Maine students.

Sincerely,

  
Patti Forster