

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 in strong opposition to LD 1704, a bill that would prohibit schools from adopting policies that allow students to use restrooms aligned with their gender identity.

This bill is discriminatory and dangerous. It targets transgender and nonbinary students for exclusion and humiliation, and in doing so, threatens their mental health, physical safety, and educational experience. It sends the harmful message that transgender students do not belong and are not worthy of the same rights and dignity as their peers.

Furthermore, this bill directly **violates the Maine Human Rights Act**, which explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity in public accommodations, including schools. The Maine Human Rights Commission has made it clear that students must be allowed to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity. LD 1704 would place school districts in direct conflict with existing state law.

This bill appears to be rooted in fear about the safety and privacy of cisgender girls in restrooms shared with transgender and nonbinary students. However, this fear is not supported by evidence. Girls' restrooms are equipped with private stalls, ensuring privacy for all users. There is no documented evidence that transgender or nonbinary students pose a threat to the safety of others in these spaces. To suggest otherwise unfairly stigmatizes an already vulnerable group of students and perpetuates harmful myths that have no basis in fact. The idea that inclusive restroom policies compromise safety or privacy is simply not supported by evidence. In fact, policies that allow students to use facilities aligned with their gender identity are in place in many Maine school districts—and across the country—without incident. These policies are implemented with careful attention to privacy for all students and reflect the professional judgment of educators and administrators who know their communities best.

More importantly, transgender students already face heightened risks of bullying, mental health challenges, and suicide. When we deny them access to a basic facility like a restroom, we increase their vulnerability and isolate them from their peers. Every student deserves to feel safe, respected, and affirmed when they walk into school each day. LD 1704 would undermine the work of schools striving to build inclusive environments. It would strip local districts of the ability to support their students in ways that are responsive, respectful, and legally compliant. It would embolden stigma and fear, and it would place transgender students in impossible, dehumanizing situations.

I urge this committee to oppose LD 1704 and to stand for the dignity, equity, and rights of all students. Let us ensure that Maine schools remain welcoming and affirming places for every learner.

Thank you for your time and commitment to justice.

Patti Forster