

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1704 – An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex

May 6, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Anne Baltren, and I have served as an educator for 15 years and have been a school counselor in Maine for 9 years. I am writing to express my strong opposition to LD 1704.

As an educator, my core mission is to create safe, inclusive learning environments where every student can thrive. We know from decades of developmental and educational research that people learn best when they feel safe and connected. Trusting relationships and a sense of belonging lower cortisol levels and support the executive brain functions required for learning and emotional regulation (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, & Krone, 2019). When students feel unsafe—socially, emotionally, or physically—their ability to learn is directly impaired.

When students—particularly transgender and gender-expansive youth—are excluded or targeted, it compromises that safety. Transgender students already face disproportionate rates of bullying, harassment. Excluding them from restrooms that align with their gender identity not only undermines their dignity—it actively increases their stress, alienation, and risk for mental health struggles. According to a 2019 study published in *Pediatrics*, transgender youth who are denied access to gender-affirming restrooms experience significantly higher rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Russell et al., 2019).

Supporters of LD 1704 argue that the bill is necessary to protect cisgender students. But there is *no* credible peer-reviewed research showing that inclusive restroom policies endanger cisgender students. In fact, a comprehensive 2020 report from the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law found *no link* between inclusive school restroom or locker room policies and safety or privacy violations involving cisgender students (Herman et al., 2020).

What does help all students—including cisgender students—is fostering inclusive, respectful environments where diversity is honored and every young person feels like they belong. As educators, we are trained to navigate sensitive issues with care, compassion, and professionalism. We do not need a one-size-fits-all policy that removes our ability to serve our students with the nuance and dignity everyone deserves.

LD 1704 sends a message to transgender students that they are not fully welcome in our schools. That message is incompatible with the values of public education in Maine, with our commitment to student safety, and with the evidence about what students need to thrive.

I respectfully urge the committee to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 1704. Let us continue doing the real work of education: supporting every child’s growth, safety, and learning.

Sincerely,

Anne P. Baltren

Educator & School Counselor
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