

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Sara Needleman, I'm a resident of Portland and the mother of two children who were born and raised in Maine. I am also a career public school educator who worked as a teacher in the K-12 system for 12 years and I have taught in the Teacher Education Department at the University of Southern Maine for the last 17 years.

I am writing in strong opposition to 8 bills before the committee today: LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704, LD 1337, LD 1432, and LD 380. Passage of these bills would have devastating effects on children in our schools and people in the wider trans community. This tiny minority has become the target for a crazed and fearful portion of our wider community that blatantly ignores science and facts in favor of fanning the flames of our insidious culture wars. Focusing on the places where trans people should not be and things they should not do polices the population which most needs protection from others. According to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, transgender people are over four times more likely than cisgender people to experience violent victimization. Additionally, data indicate that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among transgender youth. Rather than seeking to ban this group of people from activities, spaces, and access, we must support them.

Seeing that there are eight bills being introduced at once, I was unsure if I should submit testimony in opposition to all eight as a collective or each of them individually. My solution rests in my realization that not only is the introduction of eight at once an attempt to "flood the zone" – a dishonest and hurtful political tactic – but it is also an expression of a desire to fully erase trans people. As an ally to this community through friendships, professional connections, and blood ties, and as a woman of 100% Jewish descent, I find this tactic deeply disturbing.

As a middle school teacher who taught English language arts, social studies, and science, my highest calling, regardless of the academic content we were addressing in class, was always to guide students to treat one another with compassion, decency, and respect for every individual. Now, as a member of the faculty in USM's teacher education department, my goal is the same. Only now I help our rising teachers, people preparing to work in kindergarten classrooms and AP Physics classrooms alike, to see that regardless of the content they address and methodology they invoke, their greatest aim is to raise up the children in their classrooms to be their best and most complete selves.

Each of these bills runs counter to my highest goals as an educator and as a human being. I urge you to vote "Ought not to pass" for each of them. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee.

Sources Cited:

Austin, A., Craig, S. L., D'Souza, S., & McInroy, L. B. (2022). Suicidality Among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(5-6), NP2696–NP2718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520915554>

Flores, A., Meyer, I., Langton, L., & Herman, J. (2017–2018) Gender Identity Disparities in Criminal Victimization: National Crime Victimization Survey. *American Journal of Public Health*