

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jaye Rich (she/her). I serve on the Auburn School Committee, I'm treasurer of the Maine Education Association, and I teach multilingual learners at McMahon Elementary in Lewiston. I'm writing to strongly oppose LD 1337, which, under the pretense of protecting free expression, opens the door to speech that can further marginalize Maine's most vulnerable students, especially LGBTQ+ youth.

While the bill may be well-intentioned in seeking to protect those who speak out about misconduct or discrimination, the current wording does not make our spaces safer for women. In practice, it could protect individuals who choose to weaponize their speech against others under the guise of sharing "personal experience"—even when that speech is rooted in bias or harmful stereotypes.

My own legislator, Representative Libby, who supports this bill, publicly used the image of a transgender high school student to score political points on social media. Without regard for the students' safety or privacy, she exploited their identity in a broader attack on transgender rights. This is not protection, it is persecution dressed as freedom of speech.

As an educator, I work every day to build safe, welcoming environments for all students, regardless of their identity, race, or background. However, when our own lawmakers send a message that targeting trans or nonbinary youth is an acceptance form of "expression," it undermines everything we teach about dignity, inclusion, and respect.

We cannot pass legislation that enables harmful or discriminatory rhetoric to be cloaked in the language of personal testimony. Doing so will disproportionately harm marginalized communities while doing little to promote genuine justice or accountability.

I strongly urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on this bill, and any other that attacks the rights and protections of marginalized people of our community. Our students, especially those most vulnerable, are watching. They deserve better than to be used as political talking points.

**Galatians 3:28** *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jaye Rich