

Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Rev. Alison J. Buttrick Patton
Portland, ME
May 7, 2025

In Opposition To:

- [LD 233](#): An Act to Prohibit Biological Males from Participating in School Athletic Programs and Activities Designated for Females When State Funding Is Provided to the School
- [LD 868](#): An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools
- [LD 1134](#): An Act to Prohibit Males from Participating in Female Sports or Using Female Facilities

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

Thank you for taking the time to receive and review this testimony.

I am a voting resident of Portland, Maine, and a religious leader in South Portland, where I serve as the Senior Pastor of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ (the Church on Meetinghouse Hill).

I write to oppose the bills before the committee today, which would cause undue harm to transgender students and to school athletic programs in the state of Maine.

The context for my comments is my Christian faith, which teaches me that all people are made in the Divine image, that diversity strengthens our communities and that all people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Through pastoral and personal relationships with parishioners, colleagues and family members, I routinely witness what scientific data has confirmed: that human sexuality and gender identity exist on a spectrum. We cannot always see what is happening at a biological (chromosomal, cellular or hormonal) level. **We can listen to the young people who are living in their own bodies and take their experience seriously.** We can choose to believe them when they tell us that they are transgender, just as we expect our own experience to be believed.

The journey toward claiming a gender other than the one assigned at birth is often an uphill climb. I have watched young people wrestle with the tension between their intuitive sense of themselves and a culturally imposed identity. The number of young transgender people who attempt suicide, including dear ones I can name, is staggering (Among other sources, see www.thetrevorproject.org for related research and statistics). The despair I have witnessed, by those who feel forced into a framework that does not fit them, is heart-wrenching.

This is what is at stake: the *life*, mental health and well-being of young people who are being told by bills like these that they do not exist. Transgender women *are* women, by their own testimony and lived experience. If they have chosen the difficult path of claiming their identity in the face of social opposition, if they have been brave enough to stand up and say, “This is what I know about myself,” then they should be respected, not isolated or ostracized.

Some have argued that it is not “fair” to allow transgender women to compete with other women, allegedly because they will have some physical advantage. Yet we do not tell a woman with extraordinary height that she has an “unfair” advantage over her teammates on the basketball court. People come in all shapes and sizes, gender notwithstanding. Some women are larger and more powerful than some men. Some women are smaller, faster, more agile or less agile than other women.

As a former student athlete and the mother of student athletes, I know that an athlete’s success is measured not just by physical attributes, but by level of fitness, dedication, commitment to training and capacity to cooperate on a team. None of these factors is determined by gender. All students benefit from athletic programs that provide space for students to test and stretch themselves physically and mentally in a supportive environment.

As a pastor, I know that honoring the human dignity of individuals is part of cultivating a healthy community. When we respect one another, celebrate each other's accomplishments and bear each other up in times of trial, the entire community is the better for it.

Likewise, an effective athletic program encourages the personal development of every athlete and cultivates a sense of comradery and collaboration. Bills like the ones being discussed today do the opposite: they drive a wedge between athletes and between teams, giving them excuses to accuse and distrust one another. As such, **all women athletes would be *less safe and less supported should these bills pass.*** They would be subjected to increased scrutiny, likely to include invasive physical scrutiny.

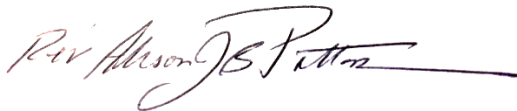
Our goal should be to foster healthy athletic programs - and whole school cultures - in which all students are affirmed for who they are, have the chance to develop self-

confidence in community, and learn to treat one another with dignity. **We can model those commitments in the State of Maine by recognizing and welcoming transgender athletes.**

To do otherwise is to do harm to our young people and diminish the richness of our wider community.

For these reasons, I am asking you to vote "OUGHT NOT TO PASS" on these bills.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Alison J. Buttrick Patton". The signature is written in black ink and includes a long horizontal flourish at the end.

The Reverend Alison J. Buttrick Patton

Alison Patton
First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ in South Portland
LD 868

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Respectfully, Rev. Alison J. Buttrick Patton