

Rikki Hallax
Freeport
LD 868

Testimony 868:

Rikki Hallax
Freeport, ME
May 8, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Rikki Hallax, I am a resident of Freeport, and I am writing in opposition of LD 868: “An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools”.

Athletics

It is my firm belief that schools are not only institutions of education, but also serve as thriving community centers that cultivate a deeply supportive environment for children of all demographics, genders, and ages to explore and expand their interests, form lasting relationships, and build social skills. When I visualize Maine’s schools, I see minimal barriers for children to flourish and realize their potential. I see opportunities for all children, regardless of race, gender, sex, etc., both inside and outside of school, that further foster their development. I see widespread encouragement from educators, challenging children to try new things and engage with extracurriculars. We should be focusing on optimizing the school environment and providing equal opportunity, not building barriers to opportunity.

The “school years” stage of childhood development (ages 6-12) is characterized by increased independence, growing cognitive abilities, and the development of social skills and friendships. At this incredibly important developmental stage, school-age children highly-benefit from participating in extracurricular activities like team sports, which are scientifically proven to develop skills such as cooperation, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and attention span in addition to physical and social growth. These skills are essential for kids to grow and to have healthy interactions with their peers and the adults in their lives.

I personally faced participation barriers in grade school due to my socioeconomic status. Enrolling in team sports was a financial burden for my family, so I wasn’t able to participate until the age of 12. By that point, I had missed vital opportunities for team-building, social bonding, and the like. While my peers went to softball practice and built relationships that could extend outside of the school environment, I was on the sidelines, isolated and afraid that I could never relate to my classmates if I wasn’t doing the same activities. Missing out on those activities had long-term effects on my well-being, both cognitively and emotionally. Banning transgender students from sports would hinder their social, emotional, and cognitive growth, as well as create a deep social divide between cisgender and transgender students, many of whom are currently happily on sports teams together with no ill effects.

LD 868 would be a barrier to the health and well-being of all of Maine’s youth. Athletic success is not determined by sex or gender, it is a combination of both physical and mental factors that greatly vary from individual to individual regardless of assigned sex at birth. Should this bill pass now, it could set a precedent for continued and strengthened gender and sex discrimination, not only in schools but in our workplaces and shared public spaces.

Restrooms and Changing Rooms

As a transgender non-binary individual that is masculine presenting, it is a daily challenge to select a restroom when there are only two options available. Regardless of which restroom I choose, there is always the potential to enter a life threatening situation. To some this may sound dramatic, but anytime a transgender individual chooses a bathroom, there is the very real possibility that others in the restroom will react violently should the individual not meet their expectations or possess the

physical attributes that are decidedly “male” or “female”. At work, I generally time my bathroom breaks to ensure that I avoid heavy foot traffic to the bathroom, such as avoiding the beginning and end of scheduled break times in the shift when most people generally use the restroom. I walk quickly and avoid direct eye contact with anyone in the restroom for my own safety. I will not engage in conversation with anyone in the restroom, even if I know them and we are friendly. It is truly unsettling that I have come to fear how and when I can access a toilet, and that others may find my presence in a bathroom “uncomfortable” when I am solely there to fulfill a basic human need.

According to an article written by researchers at the Telethon Kids Institute in Australia, school toilets have been identified by SGD (sexuality and gender diverse) students as the least safe spaces within schools. A 2017 survey about the school experiences of 23,001 SGD students in the United States found that almost 43% of students avoided toilets at school due to safety concerns or feelings of discomfort. Although SGD students have reported feeling unsafe in school toilets, toilets are particularly hostile environments for trans and gender diverse (henceforth trans) students, and have been linked to reports of verbal, physical, and sexual assault. Studies also found that 59% of trans adults had avoided toilets at school, work or in public places, with 12% experiencing harassment or assault in toilets, and 31% limiting drinking or eating in order to avoid toilets. Conversely, there have been zero recorded incidents of a SGD person harassing or assaulting a cisgender student in a bathroom. Should we allow LD 868 to pass, the potential for violence and the lasting impacts of harassment could cause irreparable damage to the children and teens of our communities.

Should gender-segregated restrooms be implemented and enforced in other areas of Maine other than educational institutions, myself and many of my friends and family could be furthermore subjected to harassment and possible assault.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote “Ought not to Pass” on this bill. Thank you!