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My name is Matsu Hikida and I am a resident of Searsmont. I am a farmer and an educator, and I am a transgender man. While many of the students and families that I have worked with do not know my gender identity, those who do have been nothing but respectful. They know that my identities are not contagious; we are each our own people.

Throughout my time as an educator, I have had the privilege of listening to some of the fears and frustrations of my students. These kids are far more perceptive than many adults are willing to give them credit for. They know that their parents work all day and still struggle to put food on the table. They worry about how unstable housing will impact their schooling. They come to school sick because their parents cannot afford to take time off work and keep them home. According to the Maine Children's Alliance 2024 Data Report, Maine has the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England, with one in five children living in food insecure households. Nearly half of Maine's children live in households that struggle to pay for basic necessities like healthcare, housing, and transportation.

You might be wondering, what does this have to do with the matter at hand? Well, that's kind of my point. There are far bigger issues facing Maine's children than the identities of other children. Passing these unnecessary bills would only stoke the fires of this new gender witch-hunt, and would send the message to our students that we do not trust or believe them. Maine is better than that, we are better than that. Instead of causing more problems and adding more fears to the lives of our students, let's work on fixing the problems that we already have.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the committee. I urge you to vote "ought not to pass" on these bills. Thank you again for your time.