

May 8th, 2025

To: Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Debra Susi. I am a 38-year educator, the 2022 Somerset County Teacher of the Year and semifinalist for the 2023 Maine State Teacher of the Year. In that time, I've taught thousands of students—students from all walks of life, each deserving of dignity, safety, and belonging.

I'm here today to speak in strong opposition to the proposed bill I am writing today to testify in opposition to LD 868, which would impose discriminatory and harmful restrictions on transgender and gender-diverse students across our state. that would restrict athletic participation and access to restrooms, changing rooms, and sleeping quarters based solely on sex assigned at birth.

This bill does not protect students—it harms them. It targets transgender and gender-diverse youth who are already at heightened risk of bullying, isolation, and suicide. It sends a clear and chilling message: *You don't belong here*. As someone who has spent nearly four decades working with children, I can tell you—policies like this do real damage.

Schools should be places of inclusion, not exclusion. We don't lift up one group of students by tearing down another.

This bill also puts our schools at odds with federal protections under Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause. Courts across the country have affirmed that gender identity is protected under the law. If this bill becomes law, Maine schools could face lawsuits, lose federal funding, and, most importantly, fail the very students they are supposed to serve.

Transgender students are not a threat. They are kids. Kids who want to learn, play sports, use the bathroom, and sleep on school trips without fear or humiliation. As educators, our job is to support every student. This bill would force us to do the opposite.

I urge you: reject this bill. Please listen to the educators, the families, and most importantly, the students. Let's keep our schools safe, inclusive, and aligned with the values of dignity and respect for all.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debra C. Susi". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom of the letter.