

Debra C Susi
61 Pierce Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
May 8th, 2025

Dear 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. I come before you today to voice my strong opposition to LD 1002 An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate.

Over nearly four decades in education, I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that acceptance and affirmation have on a student's ability to learn and thrive. Schools are not merely institutions for academic instruction; they are safe havens where students discover who they are, develop their voices, and feel seen and valued for their authentic selves. This bill threatens that foundational principle by imposing rigid identification requirements that disregard a child's affirmed name and gender unless legal documentation or parental consent is provided.

I have worked with countless students who, for various reasons, may not have the immediate support or legal means to align their school identity with who they truly are. Forcing these young people to be addressed by a name or gender that does not reflect their identity is not only disrespectful but also damaging. Research consistently shows that transgender and nonbinary students face higher rates of bullying, depression, and suicide when they are denied acknowledgment of their authentic selves. When educators are compelled by law to misgender or use a student's birth name against their will, we contribute to an environment that feels unsafe and unwelcoming. This is not the Maine I know—this is not the Maine where community means supporting one another.

The argument that using a student's affirmed name and gender causes confusion or disrupts the learning environment is simply untrue. Schools already accommodate name preferences for students who go by middle names or nicknames without issue. Respecting a student's chosen identity is not a radical shift—it is an act of basic respect and kindness that fosters a sense of belonging and security. Maine schools should be places where diversity is celebrated, not stifled.

The bill's requirement also places educators in a precarious position, forcing us to choose between following a legal mandate and honoring our moral commitment to do no harm to the children in our care. We teach our students to be empathetic, to stand up for what is right, and to celebrate diversity. Yet, this bill would have us model the opposite: exclusion, disregard, and insensitivity.

I urge you to consider the real-world implications of this legislation. Passing this bill would not simplify school processes or protect children—it would send a message of exclusion to some of our most vulnerable students. Let us continue to be a state where every child is recognized for who they are—where schools are places of safety, acceptance, and growth, not barriers to self-expression.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debra C Susi".