

Debra C. Susi
61 Pierce Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
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. LD 1134: An Act to Prohibit Males from Participating in Female Sports or Using Female Facilities. Over nearly four decades, I've taught and supported thousands of students. I can say with confidence that nothing is more essential to student success than feeling safe, seen, and respected in school. This bill undermines that by targeting transgender and gender-diverse students—some of the most vulnerable youth in our care.

Legislating which restrooms students can use based on their sex assigned at birth not only disregards established best practices in education and child development, it sends a harmful message: that transgender students are not worthy of the same dignity and respect as their peers.

This bill is also in clear violation of the **Maine Human Rights Act**, which protects individuals from discrimination based on gender identity in education, housing, employment, and public accommodations. Denying individuals access to school sports and facilities consistent with their gender identity is not only unjust—it is unlawful.

Participation in athletics and access to facilities are vital parts of the school experience. They foster physical and mental well-being, teamwork, self-confidence, and belonging. When we exclude transgender students, we tell them they don't belong in our schools. That message is not only cruel—it puts lives at risk. Transgender youth already experience disproportionately high rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide, often driven by rejection and social isolation. I have worked directly with transgender students. I have seen them thrive when they are affirmed—and suffer deeply when they are not. Denying them access to facilities that match their identity is not about privacy or safety. It's about exclusion, plain and simple. This is not a hypothetical issue. These are real children. Real families. Real consequences.

Please, don't force schools and educators to turn their backs on students who need our support. Reject this bill, and choose compassion, inclusion, and evidence over fear.

Thank you for your time and your service.

I respectfully urge you to vote **no** on this bill. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Debra C. Susi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.