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Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you, first and foremost, for your dedicated service to your constituents and to the people of Maine. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be in dialog with you and to submit this written testimony in opposition to bills presented before you today that seek to harm our trans and non-binary siblings in Maine. I write to you as both a private citizen from Portland and as an ordained minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America currently serving an Episcopal Church in Yarmouth.

As a queer person and as a woman, there was a time in the not so distant past when I was barred from ordination and leadership in both of the denominations I currently serve because of my gender identity and sexual orientation. My ability to hold the title "Reverend" is thanks to numerous advocates and allies who recognized the injustice of these rules and who worked tirelessly – and in the face of great opposition – to insist on changes to policies and rules that many in the church were not (and in some instances are still not) ready for.

The processes for welcoming women and queer people into the leadership of the church have been imperfect – many women and queer leaders continue to struggle to find jobs in the church. But, the decision to welcome them into the leadership of the church was the right thing to do. We strive to make the church a braver and more welcoming space each day.

In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes that "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). My tradition teaches that Paul's message to the early Christian communities was not meant to erase our differences, but to erase the pretense that in that list of identities there is one that is more preferred – or better – than the other. Paul's message to the early Christians and to us who practice the faith today, is to tear down and transcend the harmful disenfranchisement of whole swaths of God's creation and to instead recognize that to Christ, all of God's children are beloved in our differences.

My experience as a woman and queer person in the church informs my opposition to the bills presented to you at this time that seek to similarly restrict and exclude trans women and girls and non-binary youth from fully participating in sports, using the facilities that reflect their gender identity, and which seek to disenfranchise these young people under the guise of "fairness." Even worse, some of the bills presented to you for discussion today are designed to remove "gender identity" from the Maine Human Rights Act and to deny gender affirming care to persons under 18.

I am concerned that the bills you are discussing today are inspired by fear rather than by understanding and compassion. Bills like the ones before you that seek to prohibit trans women and non-binary individuals from participating in sports and using the bathrooms of their choice are based in the fear that trans identities are not real: transphobia perpetuates the notion that a trans woman is simply a man posing as a woman in an attempt to gain access to private spaces or sports arenas for their own gain and to violate the integrity of cisgender women. This couldn't be further from the truth. Gender dysphoria is not simply adolescent insecurity and low self-esteem and **trans individuals are not wolves in sheeps' clothing but beloved children of God who are more likely to be the victims of violence than its perpetrators.**

I am concerned that these bills are the result of a scarcity mindset which seeks to limit and restrict rather than an abundance mindset which makes space for possibility and inclusion. Just because our communities don't yet know how to integrate trans and non-binary individuals into our existing structures and, in some instances, seem hesitant to try to do so, does not mean that we should therefore make the decision to exclude them from sports, from the Maine Human Rights Act, and from receiving the medical care that they need. **If our systems for integrating our trans and non-binary siblings are imperfect, make them better by expanding our understanding of what's possible rather than restricting them.**

And finally, I am afraid that these bills are designed to tear our communities apart rather than bring them together. The local and national attention that our state is receiving and the ways in which cisgender women are being led to believe that trans women and girls are somehow displacing and threatening them is a political strategy designed to pit marginalized people against each other. When marginalized communities fight each other, the true sources of injustice can be ignored and communities stay segregated.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, the early churches were experiencing great conflict and risked breaking apart. I imagine that you, like me, feel like we are experiencing a similar time of conflict that has the potential to tear our communities apart. My tradition teaches me to lean into the promises of the truth Paul proclaims that there are no longer identities that divide us but rather a Savior who unites us. If you don't share my faith, I wonder if you may still share my patriotism that believes that **all people are created equal and we are much better off together than we are torn apart.**

My dear legislators, thank you for your time and for your consideration of my testimony. You are in my prayers as you deliberate and lead our state into the future you dream it could be.