

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Emily Goodnow, I am a resident of Lovell, I am the Senior Pastor at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Bridgton, and I am the mother of a young child. I am writing to oppose the bills before the committee on Thursday, May 8.

I've been a pastor for 14 years and in this time I have been privileged to minister to a number of families with children who identify as transgender or nonbinary, or who are exploring their gender identity. I have loved each of these children, and have grieved with them and their families that they have faced more challenge and prejudice in their young lives than any child should. What these children need is communities of support, close friendships, good mentors, and leaders who will protect them. They need to be able to play sports, be on teams, and have coaches who care about them, just like every other child. They need to be called by the names and pronouns that feel right to them, and to be trusted when they tell us who they are. My faith as a pastor calls me to stand with the marginalized, and to celebrate the difference our loving creator wrote into humanity. My heart as a mother is calling me to speak up for all children in our state to have the chance to play in their schools sports programs and to have the dignity of being called by their names.

In church leadership we often say, "the issue is never the issue," by which we mean the topic of discussion is often a stand-in for a deeper truth that we're not yet ready to articulate. I believe this is the case in most of the bills before you today. We say we are talking about sports, but we are really talking about expanding prejudice and fear of difference. We are weaponizing and politicizing simple and sacred parts of our children's childhood, including their sense of safety and dignity in school, their ability to use the bathroom and be called by their names, and their ability to play sports together. Though this argument may be good press for those who seek to codify fear and prejudice, the consequences for our community's children will be great and long-lasting. You have the power to protect Maine's children today by voting no on these bills, refusing to allow children's sports participation to become a tool for prejudice and instead letting our children get back to playing together.

Thank you for reading, for protecting our children, and for voting no on these bills.