

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee. My name is Craig Cardamone and I am a resident of Winterport and I am writing to encourage you to vote in opposition to LD 868, An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools.

As a licensed marriage and family therapist serving people all across the state and specifically working with people in the trans and non-binary community I know the inevitable mental health suffering this bill will cause if it were to pass. Due to being bound by confidentiality I cannot speak about the individual experiences of my clients, but I can provide my understanding of what they go through. I will also provide data I gathered from studies and surveys on the possible negative impacts of this bill. In most of my sessions with my transgender clients, we speak about the discrimination, trauma, and distress they experience living in a culture that continuously targets their wellbeing and safety. They describe their experiences of living in today's political climate like "terrified", "paralyzed by fear", "completely shut down". This bill contributes to dangerous myths about trans people as well as the harmful political rhetoric currently being disseminated by the media and political leaders. This bill not only targets trans athletes but all trans students, as the bill specifically names locker rooms, bathrooms, and dormitories that would force all transgender students to use facilities that do not align with their identity. Many of my clients specifically name the ability to use restrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity as positive for mental wellbeing. My clients also say that they fear being physically or sexually attacked if they are forced to use restrooms that do not align with their gender identity. It is common knowledge in therapy practice that experiencing discrimination and the possibility of being assaulted exacerbates preexisting mental health conditions and increases the risk of suicide amongst people in the trans community. I have never had a cis-gender client express concern for their safety because trans people are allowed to use restrooms that align with their gender identity. The naming of this bill of "Equity and Safety" is false, as it removes equity and increases the potential harm enacted upon trans people.

I also work with parents of trans youth. In our session we consistently discuss their worries and fears about their child's wellbeing in the face of discrimination in our larger institutions. Children who feel unsafe, stressed, and terrified cannot learn effectively, have trouble establishing friendships, and experience an increase in suicidal ideation. Parents often describe their experiences as "powerless", "frightened for the wellbeing of my child", and "desperate for finding safety for their child". Whenever a child feels accepted by their parents and broader community they experience improvement in most markers of wellbeing. This is especially true of trans youth. This bill ultimately sends a message to transgender children and their parents that the state does not care about their wellbeing and will in fact try to make things more challenging for them.

Beyond my professional experience various public surveys, scientific data, and other policy spaces suggest bills that target trans athletes and the broader trans community with dire consequences. Here are some examples. When asked in a Senate Panel held on 12/18/2024,

Senator Durbin asked president of the NCAA Charlie Baker how many total athletes there are in the NCAA and followed up that question with how many he believes identify as transgender. Baker replied there are “510,000” athletes in the whole NCAA and “Less than 10” identify as transgender. This is .002% of all US college athletes, mere fractions of a percentage of all college athletes. The Maine Principals Association has stated that there are only two transgender athletes currently participating in high school sports. According to the Trevor Project, some states that have passed bills similar to LD 868 saw “up to a 72% increase” in suicide rates among transgender youth. These statistics paint a picture of a bill that targets a small community with highly detrimental impacts to children, their families, and their communities. To put this into perspective, this bill essentially targets two children in the entire state. One has to ask, aren’t there better ways to use our time in actually making lives for everyone better? What if our energy were put into solving the housing crisis, which has disproportionately impacted trans people? Or what if we save our rural hospitals, which seem to be closing vital departments such as maternity wards and child psychiatric services? Or what if we worked to tackle the most urgent matter of today; the climate crisis? This bill and the rhetoric against trans people is all a distraction away from some of the most pressing issues everyone faces.

Maine should lead the country in making sure all children feel safe and cared for, especially those most vulnerable like transgender youth. I believe there are better and kinder ways for our state to use resources with so many actually urgent matters we need to address. We know that when the most marginalized members of our society are protected, we all benefit. No one benefits from this bill. Please vote not to pass for LD 868. Thank you.