

Julia Elizabeth Stella Gardullo  
Lincolntonville, Maine  
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Julia Gardullo, and I am a resident of Lincolntonville. I write this as a concerned citizen and a newer resident of Maine who believes deeply in the dignity and autonomy of every human being.

I grew up in a religious environment where conformity to certain norms, especially around gender, was not just expected, but enforced. I saw the harm it caused when children were punished or humiliated simply for expressing who they were. As someone who now studies religion and gender through the lens of early Christianity, I've come to understand just how much our ideas about gender have shifted and evolved over time. What remains constant is this: when we attempt to control identity from the outside, we do harm.

I remember meeting someone from the transgender community for the first time. Hearing them describe the discrimination they faced (misgendering, name-calling, physical abuse, and being denied access to gender-affirming care) was heartbreaking. Being denied resources or common courtesy didn't stop them from being trans; it just jeopardized their safety. It baffles me that anyone could listen to someone describe who they are and still insist on denying their truth. These proposed bills are no different. Under the guise of fairness or safety, they open the door to fear, harassment, and violations of privacy, especially for girls.

My husband is a teacher, and he sees every day the joy and confidence that arise when a child is simply allowed to be themselves. It benefits us all when we foster environments of acceptance, empathy, and freedom. And yet, here we are spending time, energy, and political will debating whether 1.4% of children should be allowed to exist as themselves. It begs the question: why are we spending so much time legislating fear and marginalization, when so many other challenges affecting children go unaddressed?

These bans would leave all girls vulnerable. Imagine a world where a girl who is tall, strong, or simply doesn't conform to someone else's idea of what a girl "should" look like is subjected to suspicion. These bills would invite anyone (spectators, classmates, coaches) to call for invasive and traumatizing "gender checks." That's not protecting girls; that's putting them in harm's way.

These bills would embolden bullies. They would give license to peers, community members, and even adults to question, accuse, and ostracize girls who are different. Whether they are trans or not, girls would become targets for harassment. This is not a theoretical risk. It is a guarantee, based on the track record of similar legislation elsewhere.

Any attempt to enforce these bans would require schools to police how girls look and behave. That's a gross invasion of privacy, and it places disproportionate scrutiny on girls of color and those who don't fit narrow gender norms. We know this because it's already happening. These policies do not make students safer; they foster fear, distrust, and division in our classrooms, locker rooms, and on our fields.

As a woman and a feminist, I do not see gender as a weapon to wield against others. My womanhood is not diminished by inclusion; it is strengthened by solidarity. When any girl or woman is scrutinized, policed, or denied care and shelter, we are all less safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on these bills.

Thank you.