

Gray Baldwin
Damariscotta
LD 1002

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Senator Carney and Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Maine Judiciary Committee, my name is Gray Baldwin. I live in Damariscotta, Maine. I am a therapist of over 30 years of experience as well as a professor.

I am here to testify against 1002 An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate - Rep. Sheila Lyman of Livermore Falls.

I understand that many folks feel they are protecting children and teens by instituting laws like this. However, it could not be further from the truth. There are many studies that are published in peer reviewed journals that have demonstrated the importance of acknowledging kids and teens gender identities. They have shown over and over that by denying kids this basic dignity, the acknowledgement of their gender identity and name, they are at a high risk for developing depression, anxiety, substance abuse, substance abuse. I know no one here wants to harm children in this way.

As faculty at several universities, I have attended countless trainings on the best practices for educating students. In every training, they stress the importance of create an environment where learners feel safe and connected to their teacher. Students of all ages are more engaged in learning when they feel respected and seen for who they really are. Using a person's gender identity and chosen name is essential for promoting respect, dignity, and inclusivity. When we use someone's correct gender identity and name, we affirm their sense of self and acknowledge their humanity. It reflects an understanding of their individuality and shows that we see them for who they truly are, not how society might expect them to be based on outdated norms.

By using the right pronouns and names, we contribute to a more supportive and accepting environment where people can feel safe and valued. This practice is not only an act of courtesy but also a key component in reducing harm and fostering positive mental health. For many, being misgendered or having their name dismissed can lead to feelings of rejection or invalidation, which can be damaging over time. On a broader level, respecting gender identity and chosen names promotes a culture of equity and empathy. It challenges stereotypes, combats discrimination, and encourages everyone to live authentically. Ultimately, it's about human connection—recognizing and honoring people as they are, which benefits both individuals and communities as a whole. This basic dignity allows kids and teens to feel safe and enhances their ability to engage in learning in the classroom.

I respectfully urge you to not waste our schools' precious resources on this unneeded and abusive practice.

Thank you for your time.