

Ben Bernard
Cliff Island and Portland, Maine
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Good morning, and thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

My name is Ben Bernard and I'm a resident of Cliff Island and Portland, Maine.

I am writing today to oppose the bills before the committee. I find them all terribly hurtful towards a very vulnerable group of young people.

One of the most important things I learned in high school, and re-learned again from my own kids' high-school classmates, was that it is often easiest to explore different aspects of yourself around people you don't care too much about—and who don't necessarily care too much about you. I had classmates who were gay (or some who thought they might be, and weren't sure yet) and were more comfortable talking about it with other classmates or with supportive teachers than with parents whose love and support they feared losing. Some had same-sex relationships which they kept secret from their parents for months. When they were sure, or had built up enough confidence, they finally came out to their parents. The lucky ones had supportive parents. Too many unlucky ones got kicked out of their homes, or ran away because their parents were not supportive.

I was not aware of any trans classmates at the time, although I've since learned that I did have some. My own kids did have trans classmates, including some who were just starting to come to terms with their sexuality, like my gay classmates in high-school. They were not ready to come out to their families and risk losing them, but they were taking those first steps of exerting their own identities by asking classmates and teachers to refer to them by their chosen names and genders. I don't know how many of them eventually came out to their parents, or how many eventually transitioned beyond social transition, but I DO know how important social transition was to easing their dysphoria and how much happier they were and how much better they did in school once they were accepted and recognized by their peers and teachers.

LD 1002 would foreclose this possibility. It would deprive Maine children of the space to explore their own identities, and turn schools into enforcers of gender norms.

Trans kids can face a lot of hate from other kids—especially from kids who were raised to be intolerant of any differences. Because of this, trans kids sometimes change schools as part of their social transition, so that they can “start fresh” at a new school where they are not known by their previous names or birth gender. These kids just want to live their lives and fit in. LD 233, LD 1134, LD 1704 and LD 868 would make this impossible. Imagine a trans boy needing to use the bathroom. If he goes to the girls' room girls will be upset because he presents as a boy, and to justify it he would have to out himself as trans, undermining the whole reason for the school change. He is most comfortable going to the boys' room, but LD 868 and LD 1704 would make that illegal.

Likewise, a trans girl would be unable to participate in any sporting activities. She could not participate in boys' sports without outing herself, and LD 233 and LD 1134 would make it illegal for her to participate in girls' sports.

Keep in mind that there are VERY FEW transgender children in Maine, but these bills would single them out for special misery and prevent them from benefiting from educational and athletic programs available to all other Maine children.

Thank you for letting me share my perspectives on these issues. These bills are cruel and unnecessary, and ought not to pass.