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My name is Avery Friend, I'm a Portland resident, and I'm here both with the organization MaineTransNet and as someone who's spent over a decade working in high school and higher ed settings. I'm testifying today in opposition to the bills before the committee.

From being a student myself and working in high school administration, I know very well that there are tremendous equity issues facing women and girls in schools, including in sports. I know that the girls who had the most athletic success when I was growing up were the ones who had the ability to join teams and work with private coaches after school, the ones with reliable transportation and families that were able to afford uniforms and travel with them each weekend to different events, the ones who didn't have to go work after school or return home to look after their siblings. I know that financial access was—and remains—one of the single largest barriers that impacts significant percentages of students of ALL genders and demographics from participating equally, and that many other such barriers exist at all levels of sports participation. I have yet to see any of these far broader barriers addressed by the folks who claim to be so concerned about equity in sports, and further, the fact that they're taking a one-size-fits-all approach to this issue shows just how inappropriate these efforts are: all sports, at all levels, require understanding of the sport and landscape to best address fairness, and these issues are already under the purview of the organizations and governing associations responsible for and familiar with the issues relevant to the specific sports and teams.

With that in mind, it is ludicrous to sit here today and pretend that anyone here in favor of these blatantly discriminatory bills are doing so out of genuine concern for the rights of women and girls. As a cisgender woman, I am horrified and offended that they would believe we wouldn't see right through it and furious that this is what our elected representatives are wasting our collective time on in light of the actual threats and inequities facing us. Most of those come from or are enabled by the same people doubling down on the notion that women and girls need protection, but conveniently, just from the minority of people that they're targeting at any given moment. As such, these bills cannot be disguised as anything but another malicious and blatant effort to further stigmatize what is clearly the most significant threat and widespread issue facing Mainers right now: a tiny demographic of kids who just want, and deserve, to play sports.

Thank you very much.