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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Itzel Gourmelon, and I'm a resident of Stonington, on Deer Isle. I am here today in opposition of the bills before the committee. Happy V day. How interesting it is to address you all today on the anniversary of one of the most tragic moments of our modern history that began with the erasure of identities. I write to you today in hopes that we can work together to move away from these alarmingly familiar historical echoes. That we are bold and kind enough to remember that humans of all identities, orientations, and bodies deserve the right to participate in life, extracurricular activities, and school alongside family, friends, and classmates.

I am a teacher for early childhood students ages 3-7. I teach life skills at a school, but I also teach swimming at a community center and encourage students to grow through play and exploration. As a teacher, I know these bills would hurt Maine schools and communities.

Schools should create a supportive environment where every student can receive an education and participate in school activities. Every day, I watch the children in my class working to understand themselves and their place in the world. A school should be safe enough for children to grow and learn to become active and empowered members of our society and culture. It is my observation that when one student is affected, or having a bad day, a chain reaction is set off that distrubs and disrupts the entire class. By allowing these bills to pass, we subject girls, boys, and all children to invasive interrogation or put them at risk of public ridicule. This public ridicule, I assure you, can lead to injury or death.

I know this personally from the death of my best friend, a trans man and an athlete. A human who could no longer live because of the suffering inflicted from enduring the torture of systems that did not support him. A system biased against him. All he was seeking was the same as anyone else: Security and Joy. Instead, he was handed obstacles, discrimination, and negligent medical care. How many friends must we bury due to death by discrimination and societal negligence before we wake up to understand the impact our laws have on children and the grown-ups they might one day be? Safety is at home, yes. But also in schools and in the laws we choose to make to impact their day-to-day. This is why as a state, Maine must stand up against the national political agenda interfering with our rights to make our own laws.

Passing this would reward the federal government's bullying tactics and open the door for further attacks on Mainers' civil rights, but it won't make Maine more safe or fair for anyone. These bills discriminate against transgender students violate both state and federal constitutional guarantees of equal protection. LD 233, LD 868, and LD 1134 are discriminatory on the basis of sex and therefore are not constitutional.

I fear this is only the beginning of many proposed bills to undermine certain members of society. Where does it stop, and who is next on your agenda? When will kids be allowed to be kids without being political bargaining tokens? 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!