

May 8, 2025

Hello, My name is Sophie and I'm writing on behalf of Portland Outright, myself, and my community. I urge the members of this committee to vote **ought not to pass** on **LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, and LD 1704**. I would like to thank the members of this committee for their time and work today. I'll make sure this is a quick read.

These bills are a sad attempt to divide our communities by politicizing sports, activities meant to foster companionship and build character. I urge the members of this committee to critically read and consider the ramifications of bills like these.

I would like to share a story of my wrestling career since starting college. I'll set the scene for you; imagine a congregation of excited young adults all converging to a sand pit in the middle of the woods on a crisp April morning. Every single one of those college students have one thing on their minds – wrestling. This tradition differs, in that there is no formal structure save for a few safety rules, and if you want to wrestle, no matter your size, weight, experience or gender, you can wrestle. That morning I saw and participated in a multitude of different matches. I saw a fight between eight people at once; a person that weighed 125 lbs wet fighting a bodybuilder that could lift them as a warm up; fights that required skill and trash talk rather than strength and muscle. I even saw a few thumb wars.

I would love for the members of this legislature to understand how hard it is to wrangle college students together for any event. For an event hosted in the early hours of the morning, a turn out of about 75 students is impressive. This scale of event speaks to the type of community building and relationships that comes with competitive athletics – formal or otherwise. What was truly beautiful about these wrestling matches was how quickly we realized that sport and competition brought folks in and gave us new experiences. Not once during that morning, or during this tradition, did we feel fear.

I bring this up to showcase to the committee the kinds of generative and transformative things that happen when people are involved in sport and community with one another. These bills would end that. At the heart of these bills is the idea that certain people are weak and some people are strong. And the strong people are inherently a danger to the weak. I don't believe this to be true. Nor do I think that idea is what Maine's communities are built on. All of these bills are predicated on the discrimination and exclusion of certain young people because of this fear.

I question the integrity of bills like these. I worry that these bills would push us down an already slippery slope. The young people these bills talk about excluding deserve to play and build meaningful relationships with their peers. They deserve to have the same experience as their peers. Sports in schools, and in general, has never had the end goal of winning or losing. Nowhere in my highschool's handbook does it talk about "winning" or "losing". Instead it talks about leadership and the important lessons that we learn while being on a team; dignity, respect, poise, responsibility, integrity, decisiveness, and empathy.

While these bills address sports, bathrooms and facilities, it has never truly been about that. It's not about fairness, safety or protections. These bills are structured around discrimination and exclusion. I urge the members of this committee to have compassion. Understand that these bills will exclude young people from participating in their communities. The end goal is to isolate young people and force schools to conform to the agenda of a loud minority. Is infringing on our personal liberties and freedoms worth their comfort? Are these bills worth the blowback?