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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 Katie Saunders, and I was born and raised in Hampden, ME. I am submitting testimony in strong opposition to the bills before the committee today. I am horrified to see the slew of discriminatory anti trans bills that are being proposed in our state.

I can think of hundreds of better ways that our Maine legislature could spend their time other than these hateful bills. High school and middle school trans athletes make up approximately 1% of the population, yet our legislature seems obsessed with policing them and their bodies.

Ciswomen continue to be told that these anti trans bills are “pro-women” and are going to protect cis women. I disagree. I believe that hateful, discriminatory practices harm everyone. Including trans athletes on youth sports teams supports positive values like good sportsmanship and inclusivity. Indeed, this should be what youth sports is all about. Excluding a subset of specific athletes, for whatever reason, undermines team unity and encourages divisiveness, the opposite values that we want to teach our kids. These rules will also introduce a “policing” overtone about “who is really a girl.”

I have serious concerns with how these bills will be enforced. Other states that have passed similar bills call for genital exams of minor athletes. Any athlete that “doesn’t look enough like a girl” is subject to these exams, and can be “accused” by anyone. How is this protecting women?

The belief that allowing trans women and girls to participate in youth sports is unfair perpetuates the idea that cis female bodies are weaker and inferior. The idea that trans girl athletes always have a complete competitive advantage is false. In today’s transphobic climate, trans athletes face discrimination and harassment. Transgender athletes vary in their athletic skills and body type and composition, just like cis gender athletes. Again, to say that a trans girl automatically has an advantage is not just false, it perpetuates the idea that cis women are weak and inferior. These bills do not impact olympic or collegiate level sports - those levels already have their own rules. In my opinion, youth sports should be about teamwork, good sportsmanship, and inclusivity.

Banning trans people from spaces like bathrooms will take us back 10 years in terms of social equity. Lawmakers, very often cis men, tell cis gender women that this is for their own protection. The “bathroom predator” myth has been debunked over and over. The truth is that trans people are the ones facing discrimination, violence, and harassment.

Let’s let Maine be a safe place for people of all gender identities. Let’s teach our children that everyone should have the right to play youth sports.

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