

Maine Education Association
Jesse Hargrove **President** | Beth French **Vice President** | Jaye Rich **Treasurer**
Rebecca Cole **NEA Director** | Rachelle Bristol **Executive Director**

Testimony

In Opposition To

LD 233: An Act to Prohibit Biological Males from Participating in School Athletic Programs and Activities Designated for Females When State Funding Is Provided to the School
LD 868: An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools
LD 1002: An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate
LD 1134: An Act to Prohibit Males from Participating in Female Sports or Using Female Facilities
LD 1704: An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex
LD 1337: An Act to Amend the Maine Human Rights Act Regarding Female Athletes and Safety in Women's Single-sex Shelters
LD 1432: An Act to Remove Consideration of Gender Identity from the Maine Human Rights Act
Jesse Hargrove, President, Maine Education Association

Before The Judiciary Committee

May 8th, 2025

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

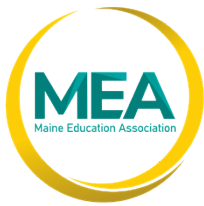
My name is Jesse Hargrove, and I am a high school social studies teacher serving as president for the Maine Education Association (MEA). The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators, including educators and school employees in nearly every public school in the state, as well as full-time faculty and other professional and support staff in both the University of Maine and Community College systems. In addition, thousands of retired educators continue their connection and advocacy work through the MEA-Retired program.

I offer testimony today on behalf of MEA in **opposition** to the following bills:

- **LD 233, An Act to Prohibit Biological Males from Participating in School Athletic Programs and Activities Designated for Females When State Funding Is Provided to the School**
- **LD 868, An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools**
- **LD 1002, An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate**

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- **LD 1134, An Act to Prohibit Males from Participating in Female Sports or Using Female Facilities**
- **LD 1704, An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex**
- **LD 1337, An Act to Amend the Maine Human Rights Act Regarding Female Athletes and Safety in Women's Single-sex Shelters**
- **LD 1432, An Act to Remove Consideration of Gender Identity from the Maine Human Rights Act**

Maine educators strive to provide every student with a quality education, regardless of background, gender, race, or any other factor. We know students who do not feel safe will struggle to learn and thrive, and the responsibility of educators is to make sure every student who comes through the schoolhouse doors can meet their academic potential. However, the eight bills you will hear today seek to restrict students' freedom to learn safely and participate fully in their school community and sports, impacting all students across the state.

MEA members have been clear – they understand that respecting students is critical to their success and our position is directly rooted in the guiding documents of our union. The Representative Assembly (RA) of the MEA is our organization's highest decision-making body and annually brings together member leaders from all over the state. Through the RA, our members establish the policies that guide our work and our direction. Our members, as recently as 2024, have affirmed their view when the delegates passed the following resolution:

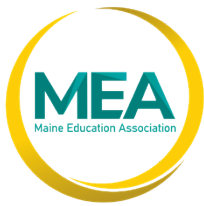
Resolution of the Maine Education Association:

E37. RESOLVED: MEA believes that all students, inclusive of their identity, e.g.: • race, religion, culture, language, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, immigration status; • age, health, disability; • gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation; • residency status or location, socioeconomic status, and/or family makeup must have equitable access to a quality, well-rounded public education. **We must ensure that all students are accepted, included, valued, respected, and supported. The diverse needs of all students—academic, social, cultural, emotional, and physical—must be acknowledged, and resources and services must be provided that enable each student to be successful in their educational journey.** All students must have access to a safe, caring, compassionate, well-resourced learning environment that prioritizes their well-being and their education, and that inspires a lifelong love of learning.

These bills before you stand in opposition to the MEA's position of accepting and supporting all students and instead exploit divisions and fears, denying Mainers—especially students—the basic rights, resources, and respect they deserve. They specifically limit the freedom to learn safely and participate inclusively in schools, where we should be setting an example of inclusivity.

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We understand the importance of school activities like sports teams and after-school clubs in fostering social learning, problem-solving skills, and lifelong friendships for students. Yet, the series of bills before this committee seek to exclude a small group of students from participating as fully as other children are allowed to do. This is fundamentally wrong and will cause harm to all Maine students.

The proposed legislation denies Maine's transgender students access to the well-being, educational, and social benefits of sports, while also restricting the use of preferred names, pronouns, and bathroom access. These bills strip discrimination protections from transgender and nonbinary Mainers, ignoring the reality that transgender women and girls are women and girls, and transgender men and boys are men and boys. Like all children, they deserve the opportunity to fully participate in their school communities and be part of a team.

Furthermore, we are deeply troubled about the potential effects that this recent wave of attempts to exclude certain students and groups of people could have on the mental health of our transgender and non-binary students. Despite claims that these bills will “protect students,” the data is clear: **trans-exclusive policies do not protect students; on the contrary, they cause substantial harm to trans and nonbinary youth.** According to The Trevor Project National Survey, over 52%¹ of trans and nonbinary youth have seriously considered suicide in the last year. The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey identifies 2,600 LGBTQ+ Maine high school students—**enough to fill 54 school buses**—considered suicide in 2021².

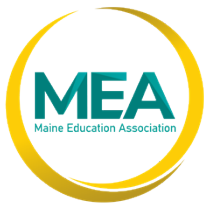
As you consider bills seeking to exclude groups of students from playing sports, using restrooms, limiting access to healthcare, and stripping Mainers of their legal protections from discrimination, remember that these policies are harmful, cruel, and have detrimental impacts on mental health. However, state, and national data, demonstrate that schools and communities that implement inclusive policies are associated with lower suicide risk, better school attendance, stronger academic achievement, and better outcomes for all students.³

These bills rely on scare tactics to divide us, yet they lack evidence that transgender sports participation impacts cisgender students' success. In reality, data indicates that inclusive policies boost participation in girls' sports. In fact, in states with inclusive policies, girls' sports participation has increased.³ Trans and nonbinary youth who report that their pronouns are respected by most people in their lives attempt suicide at half the rate of those who do not have their pronouns respected. Furthermore, the Center for

¹ The Trevor Project. (2020). National survey on LGBTQ youth mental health. Retrieved from <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Research-Methodology>

² Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey LGBTQ+ Factsheet. (2023). Retrieved from https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2024-01/MIYHS%20LGBTQ%2B%20Factsheet_FINAL_Approved_28Sep23.pdf

³ Center for American Progress. (2021, March 18). Fact sheet: The importance of sports participation for transgender youth. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fact-sheet-importance-sports-participation-transgender-youth/>



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American Progress finds that transgender youth living in states with fully inclusive athletic policies, such as Maine, are 14% less likely to consider suicide.

As Mainers, we have long recognized that discrimination is unjust and that everyone deserves equal opportunities to succeed. Maine Human Rights Law has protected gender identity since 2005, and existing rules already govern participation in school activities. This principle extends to transgender youth, who deserve to have the same opportunities as their classmates to engage fully in their school communities. Instead, these proposed changes to Maine law are a solution in search of a problem, would reverse decades of progress, and cause irreparable harm.

We urge the committee to reject all the proposed bills before you today, Maine schools are the heart of our communities. It is essential to create safe, welcoming environments for all students and educators. We must stand together, reject division, and build a better future for everyone.

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