



Consent. Boundaries. Healthy Relationships.

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Speak About It
Portland, ME 04101

May 8, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Oronde Cruger and Olivia Harris, and we represent Speak About It, a nonprofit celebrating fifteen years of service in Portland, ME. We are grateful to have served nearly 700,000 students and youth-serving adults in that time. Speak About It provides comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education through discussion, storytelling, creative tools, and the provision of resources. We are writing in opposition of the bills before the committee today.

If the intention behind these bills is to create a safer climate for young people, these bills will not achieve that goal. Data shows that the most effective preventative measure for sexual risk taking and harm is a supportive relationship with parents and adults. Bills that require students to hide their identities at school in order to participate in community-building activities like sports, and even to access basic needs like using a bathroom, will not keep them any safer and will not facilitate trusting relationships. Silence around social issues almost always breeds fear, shame, and stigma, what those of us who work in healthy relationships education call the unholy trinity.

Data also shows a directly proportional relationship between adolescent depression and suicidality and negative media attention covering anti-lgbtq legislature amongst queer youth. With studies suggesting that about 22% of Gen Z identify as queer, bills like these run the risk of causing significant emotional harm to young people and can potentially serve to isolate them from speaking openly to the adults in their lives.

Studies and best practice show the importance of autonomy for healthy teen development (within and without their intimate lives) and the proposed bills would require a tremendous loss of control over one's own life. For example, being required to use the name on one's birth certificate is a confusing standard that has never come up before. "Robert" wanting to be called "Bob" has never hurt anyone just as "Catherine" being called "Clifford" has not. Allowing folks freedom of expression is a critical and fundamental right in this country.

Bans affecting transgender students do not impact only them. As with any other aspect of identity, gender identity can change over the lifespan. In addition, these bans will invite gender-based harassment for women and girls throughout Maine. Should these laws pass, any person can call for an invasive (at best) or traumatizing (at worst) "gender check" on anybody who wants to play sports or use a particular bathroom and does not fit a widespread gender stereotype. As we know from fifteen years working with youth throughout Maine, nobody feels

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that they accurately represent all social aspects of their gender. Weaponizing personal identity to allow anyone to bully and harass our youth is not the role of the legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. We urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Oronde Cruger and Olivia Harris

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