

Testimony Opposing 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

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and other members of the committee.

My name is Jess Knox, and I am a lifelong Mainer and a father who lives in Portland and who believes deeply in the principles of fairness, dignity, and respect for all individuals. I am here today to express my strong opposition to LD 1002.

LD 1002 requires public schools to identify students solely by the name and gender on their birth certificates, ignoring the affirmed identities of transgender and nonbinary students. This policy undermines the autonomy and well-being of these individuals and contradicts the inclusive values that our state aims to support.

As a parent, I recognize how crucial it is for schools to be safe, supportive spaces where every child feels acknowledged and respected. When educators are compelled to disregard a student's affirmed name and gender, it can heighten feelings of isolation and distress, particularly among transgender youth. Studies show that these exclusionary practices lead to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicide within the transgender student population.

This effort, which is clearly fueled by the type of divisive, cruel political strategies that are so popular with some, is contrary to all that is good about this state.

Additionally, this legislation puts educators in a difficult situation, forcing them to act against their professional judgment and the best interests of their students. Teachers and school staff are trained to foster the overall development of all students, yet policies like LD 1002 obstruct their effectiveness in this role. Shouldn't our teachers have better things to do than implement an ideological agenda that's trending on certain ideological forums and social media?

Maine has a rich tradition of safeguarding its citizens' rights. In 2005, we strengthened the Maine Human Rights Act to encompass gender identity, ensuring protection against discrimination for everyone, irrespective of their gender identity. However, LD 1002 opposes this commitment by reducing protections and specifically targeting a vulnerable group of students.

In conclusion, LD 1002 represents a setback for Maine. It undermines our state's commitment to equality, lacks a foundation in evidence, and poses a significant threat to the well-being of transgender youth. I urge you to reject this bill and instead focus on policies that support and uplift all students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.