

Ronan Aubrey
Portland
LD 1432

Ronan Aubrey, LCPC, NCC
Portland, Maine
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ronan Aubrey (he/they pronouns), I'm a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor and a resident of Portland, Maine, and I am writing to you today in opposition of the bills LD 1432 and LD 380 proposed before the committee today.

LD 1432 would remove gender identity as a protected class in the Maine Human Rights Act; protections for gender identity were added to this Act in 2005. As a transgender man, this gravely concerns me. I am thirty-one years old, and I have built my life in Maine – I was raised here, went to school here, bought a home here, and continue to live and work here – I love this state, and I plan on staying. Does this state love me – or, as the very least, respect me enough to protect my right to continue to pursue each these things without discrimination? Transgender Mainers deserve protection from discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodation, credit and educational opportunity. Instances of discrimination are real, have devastating impacts, and affect us disproportionately.

In the Maine State Report in the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 25% of transgender Mainers who responded who had held or applied for a job during that year reported being fired, being denied a promotion, or not being hired for a job they applied for because of their gender identity or expression; 28% of survey respondents reported experiencing housing discrimination in the past year, such as being evicted from their home or denied a home or apartment because of being transgender; and 80% of respondents who were out or perceived as transgender experienced some form of discrimination or mistreatment at school at some point between kindergarten and grade twelve. This is not “the way life should be” for transgender Mainers – we deserve the right to build a life in this beautiful state with explicit protections in place for all avenues in which we continue to experience discrimination.

Finally, I also urge you to vote no on LD 380, which would repeal provisions enacted by Public Law 2023, chapter 648 protecting persons who seek, health care practitioners who provide, and those who assist health care practitioners in providing, gender-affirming health care services and reproductive health care services in accordance with the applicable standard of care. As a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who is trained and specializes in working with transgender youth and young adults, many of the youth that I work with are also working with or seeking care from gender-affirming health care providers such as The Gender Clinic at Maine Medical Center. These services are vital to these youth. In a 2022 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association titled Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care, it was found that youth ages 13 to 20 who had received gender-affirming healthcare in the form of gender-affirming hormones or puberty blockers in the past 12 months had 60% lower odds of depression and 73% lower odds of experiencing self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

In other words: for those who need it, access to gender-affirming care has an undeniably positive impact on their mental health.

Please let that sink in for a moment.

The youth that I work with are stronger and more resilient than they should have to be. They face enormous hurdles each and every day, and they deserve access to care that sees and affirms them. Maine state law has allowed health care providers and patients to safely give and receive the care they need, and LD 380 would cause great

harm both to health care professionals who provide vital gender-affirming care, and their recipients in desperate need.

I have witnessed firsthand the powerful impact of providing a safe, accepting space for the young transgender clients I have had the privilege of working with. And for many of my transgender clients, I have seen the benefits of access to support, access to information about gender-affirming treatment options, and access to a knowledgeable and experienced medical team. I have seen the joy on a transgender young person's face, felt the shift in their resolve to live and take up the space that they deserve – and, yes, documented the reduction in their anxious and/or depressive symptomology – when they have and utilize the resources that they need.

For some, it is steps towards social transition – a name change or modes of self-expression that are congruent with their gender identity. For others, it includes steps towards medical transition – access to puberty blockers to create more time and space to make informed decisions, potentially exploring the possibility of gender-affirming hormones and/or gender-affirming surgery later on in their journey. For some, it is all or none of the above, but the access to a team of healthcare professionals who can provide accurate information and attentive, supportive care in accordance with the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care is essential in helping them make that determination and receive the tailored care that they need. Whatever the shape their journeys take, for many young transgender Mainers, gender-affirming care is crucial to their mental and physical health and well-being.

In The Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People, LGBTQ+ youth in Maine stated the top two ways that adults in their life can show up for them: "Trust that I know who I am" and "Stand up for me."

I urge you to stand up for and protect some of our most vulnerable Mainers, and to trust that they know who they are.

I urge the Committee members to vote "Ought not to Pass" on bills LD 1432 and LD 380.

Thank you.