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Testimony in OPPOSITION of:

- **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
- **LD 380**, An Act to Amend Certain Laws Regarding Gender-affirming Health Care Services

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Kinch, and I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance in opposition to all the bills before the committee today.

I want to start by stating a simple fact I believe to be true: All youth in Maine deserve to live long, healthy lives and feel connected to their communities.

The Trevor Project, a nonprofit organization that focuses on suicide prevention in transgender youth, has found higher rates of suicide attempts in trans youth who report that their homes, schools, or communities are not accepting of their identity. Passage of

these bills would send a clear message to trans youth that their communities and their state do not accept them.

Given that more than 1 in 4 high schoolers and 1 in 5 middle schoolers identified as LGBTQ+, that message and its implications will be drastic for youth mental health, safety, and well-being.

Statistics about trans youth suicide are startling. Almost half of Maine's transgender and nonbinary youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. Over 1 in 10 attempted suicide.

We know why LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to die by suicide. LGBTQ+ youth who experienced bullying of any kind reported three times the rate of attempting suicide compared to those who were not bullied.

When children see adults doing the bullying, what message does that send?

The best way to protect these youth is to make sure they have access to gender-affirming spaces like their schools, their healthcare providers, their shelters, their bathrooms, and their sports teams.

Research shows that transgender and nonbinary youth who had access to gender-affirming clothing, gender-neutral bathrooms at school, and had their pronouns respected by others had lower rates of suicide compared to those who did not. Studies have shown that when youth are provided access to a gender-neutral bathroom at their school, suicide attempts decrease.

We know that participating in youth sports can lead to immediate and long-term benefits for youth, their families, and communities. With specific regard to mental health, participating in sports is associated with lower rates of anxiety and depression and reduced risk of suicide. We should want more youth to play sports, not put up barriers for them to participate.

As a student athlete who has competed alongside and against trans athletes, I can affirmatively state that this was a non-issue for me playing the very physical sport of college rugby. My friends got to compete as they identified, and my competition got to do the same. Have you asked the youth athletes in your life how they feel about all this?

Supporting these bills would amount to state-sanctioned bullying of children and youth. For those who are afraid or don't understand the experiences of these young people, educate yourself and ask questions.

Nearly 2 in 5 LGBTQ+ youth said that they or their family have considered moving to a different state because of anti-LGBTQ+ politics and laws. Policies like these that promote discrimination and seek to roll back the civil rights of LGBTQ+ people make Maine another unsafe state for these children and their families, who desperately want to protect them and keep them alive.

Shelter is life-saving, respect and support are life-saving, sports are life-saving, access to health care is life-saving, and even bathrooms are life-saving when they are gender affirming.

I urge you, please, to vote ought not to pass on all of these bills for the sake of trans, non-binary, and LGBTQ+ youth in our state and in the nation. All youth in Maine deserve to live long, healthy lives and feel connected to their communities — make sure they know you are some of the adults who believe that, too.

References

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>

<https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/>

https://odphp.health.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/YSS_Report_OnePager_2020-08-31_web.pdf